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TheVillage
Issue #250 December 2024/January 2025
THERE'S NO PLANET B
Wishing everyone a fantastic Christmas!
NEWS & FEATURES from Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Blackwell, Burcot Beoley, Cofton Hackett, Finstall, Hopwood, Bordesley, Rowney Green, Lickey, Lickey End, Marlbrook, The Oakalls & everywhere in between!

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TheVillage Issue 250 Dec 24/Jan 25

inside

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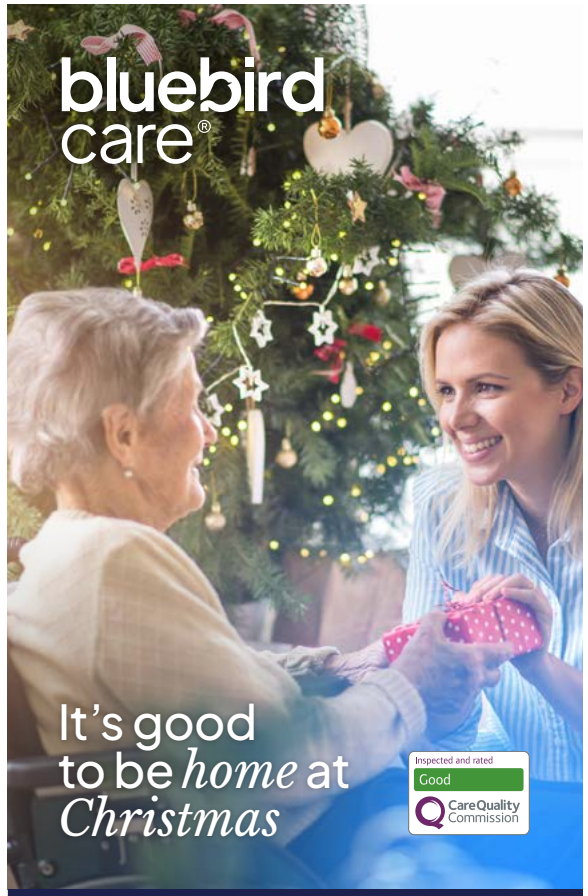
Front cover: Just a few of the faces and places featured in The Village in 2024.



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'WRONG SITE FOR SOLAR'

Energy 'farm' a disaster, say residents

RESIDENTS have stepped up their opposition to a planned 75-acre solar energy site spread across a recognised area of natural beauty.

The solar "farm" proposed by the energy company Exagen would run across open farmland on either side of the Icknield Street Roman road from Weatheroak Hill, known for its Coach & Horses pub, all the way south to the M42 motorway.

Weatheroak Residents Association (WRA) has submitted its response to Exagen, noting that it would entail around 64,000 solar panels standing up to 10ft off the ground, producing 25 megawatts of electricity, together with battery storage units the size of shipping containers.

The site, which Exagen is calling "Oak Valley" would be surrounded by 9ft fences, CCTV cameras and security lighting. The residents describe it as "an industrial complex in a rural setting".

They complain that despite stating their "early stage and comprehensive consultations with community groups ensure that we listen to and act upon the needs of local people", Exagen had only organised drop-in sessions in Wythall and Rowney Green.

"No attempt was made to consult the Weatheroak Residents Association or to arrange the drop-in sessions at venues in Weatheroak itself, despite being advised that such venues were available," said the residents.

The National Trust, which has designated Weatheroak Hill as part of its 8 Hills Regional Park, has recently installed a new walk, gates and benches to a viewpoint which takes in "Oak Valley".

Santerrific! Abigail Gordon is congratulated by Santa after seeing her festive light switched on in the centre of Barnt Green for the first time. Eight-year-old Abigail won a competition to design a Christmas light run by St Andrew's First School with her very colourful angel design (inset, above). *Lights fantastic: See Pages 20-23*

"With houses on three sides, including listed buildings, it's difficult to imagine a site less suitable for a solar complex," said WRA.

"The approval of a planning application for 'Oak Valley' would not only be a disaster for the local community, landscape and amenities, but also create a precedent for speculators to disfigure the whole area with solar panels," they added.

Beauty spot: The new National Trust footpath to the top of Weatheroak Hill.

Christmas Day deadline for hotel objections

THE OWNERS of the former Alvechurch Sports & Social Club – now called the Alvechurch Inn – have appealed against the refusal to give planning permission to extend the building into a 28-bedroom hotel.

The plan was unanimously rejected by Bromsgrove District Council's planning committee in July after hearing from Coun Charlie Hotham that if the current building was considered a "carbuncle", the proposal to extend it would create a "juggernaut-buncle".

Villagers now have until December 25 to make representations to the planning inspector.

Among the reasons given by the Head of Planning Ruth Bamford in the original rejection were: "The existing building was at odds with the historic and architectural character of the Alvechurch Conservation Area.

"The proposed extension would, by reason of its overall design, bulk, scale and massing, cause an unacceptable visual impact on the Alvechurch Conservation Area."

The rejection also pointed out: "The proposed development would, by reason of insufficient car parking, have a consequential displacement of vehicles to the public highway,."

James Brown, chair of Alvechurch Residents Association, told *The Village*: "The Alvechurch Inn's application was unanimously rejected by Bromsgrove District Council Planning Committee.

"The scheme would be a totally inappropriate development in our conservation area and would cause traffic and parking chaos which would negatively impact businesses and residents. ARA is disappointed that this is being brought to appeal considering the number of strong objections from the residents, parish and district councils. Alvechurch Residents Association will continue to fight this proposal."

ALVECHURCH Parish Council chairman Marc Worrall helps Jenny Benton (right) to cut the ribbon to mark the refurbishment of the gates to The Meadows playing field before being joined by other members and friends of the council (above).

The council won £12,000 from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund to carry out the work. The Meadows are formally known as the Wiggin Memorial Playing Fields after the land was given to the parish by the Wiggin family in memory of their son George, killed in action in the First World. Jenny, neé Biddle, who was born on Swan Street, Alvechurch, and now lives in Barnt Green, was asked along because her grandfather was the last coachman to the Wiggin family.

■ Anyone wishing to make a representation to the planning inspector should go to: https://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/ and enter the seven digit case reference number 3354949.

A ten-year dream

THE DREAM of passenger lifts at Barnt Green Station is looking closer to reality after Network Rail submitted its planning notice to carry out the work to Bromsgrove council.

"I am fairly optimistic it is going to happen," Barnt Green Parish Council chairman Robert Cholmondeley told fellow councillors. He envisaged the work being completed by next August, "by which time it will be the tenth anniversary of the removal of the original bridge".

'Lucky' to have 30mph

ROWNEY GREEN traffic data doesn't support a speed limit reduction to 20mph, county councillor Aled Luckman told Alvechurch Parish Councillors. "We are lucky that it is 30mph, being country lanes," he added.

Rowney Green Residents Association chairman John Cypher responded: "20mph is not dead in Rowney Green. I think it will be an election issue come the county council elections next May."

Memorial protection

BEOLEY Parish Council has installed new bollards around the village war memorial (right). The work was done by council members in their free time, with help from Craddocks Metal Recycling, who donated the bollards, and Redditch Shot-blasting and Powder Coating who prepared them.

Villages remember

A VILLAGE Remembrance service was attended by more than 400 residents in November, to pay their respects to fallen servicemen and women.

Alvechurch Remembrance service, held on the village green is organised by volunteers including parish councillor Brett Shepherd and groups from across the parish.

The Remembrance began with a special service at St Laurence church, which was well attended, with some villagers having to stand due to a full church.

Following the service, they were joined on the village green by more villagers who arrived at 10.45am to pay their respects.

Pupils from Alvechurch Middle School and Crown Meadow First School read the names of soldiers from the parish who have died in wars over the years, and laid crosses for each name.

Groups of Rainbows, Scouts, Guides and Brownies were also in attendance, and a tuneful rendition of the national anthem was sung.

The Rev. Gail Rogers led the crowd in a two-minute silence and wreaths were laid by representatives from councils, the army, police force and a number of village groups.

Flags are lowered: Village groups of Scouts, Guides, Rainbows and Brownies hang their flags in respect.

Clockwise from left: A village youngster reads the names of fallen soldiers. Members of the parish and county Council. The knitted poppy postbox. Crown Meadow pupils lay their hand-print wreath. Alvechurch Middle School lay crosses for each fallen soldier.

A CROWD gathered at the Lickey Memorial on the misty morning of Remembrance Sunday.

The sun peeked through the clouds at 11am and the names of the fallen were read out by Parish Councillor Bakul Kumar.

A service was led by Rev Sheri Gidney, and local guide and scouts troops were also in attendance.

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Charity Christmas tree recycling

FEE's TREES, based in Cofton Hackett, is once again organising a charity Christmas tree collection and recycling scheme. The service is available for residents of Cofton, Barnt Green, Alvechurch, Hopwood, Redditch and Bromsgrove areas.

Last year an amazing £4,703 was raised for Birmingham Children's Hospital (BCH) through people making a donation to have their trees taken away after Christmas.

Fee's Trees owner Fiona Edwards, who is an Ambassador for BCH, said: "Over the years we have raised a total of more than £92,650. We are aiming to break the £100,000 mark this year."

Fiona added: "So many people love a real Christmas tree but don't want the upheaval of moving it in their own car after the big day. By providing this service we can help them save time and mess.

"We are hoping to raise enough money to fund two sensory tablets for Ward 5. This is the ward where children go if they are having a planned operation or need one quickly after an accident. This is also the orthopaedic and trauma ward who cater for children and young people who require specialist skills from a multitude of teams including orthopaedic, spinal surgery, ear, nose and throat (ENT), plastic and eye surgery. These tablets cost £4,500 each."

In addition to the tree recycling scheme, Fee and the team of volunteers continue to fundraise throughout the year. Fee said: "I am taking part in the London Marathon in April, and you will see us as usual fundraising at Picnic in the Park."

Fee's Trees have once again teamed up with volunteers from LogCo.co, Hopwood Tree Services and Trinity House Group.

The teams of volunteers will be out collecting trees on 5 January 2023.

■ To arrange a collection or to check if your area is included, scan the QR code or visit www.justgiving.com/page/bch2025trees to make your donation and then text your home address to 07941 936 668 or email: bchtreecollection@btinternet.com.

Groups of Blackwell First School and Nursery pupils planted 172 bulbs at the newly refurbished play area in Blackwell.

Each child at the school planted a bulb as part of Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council's wildflower project at the play area.

The first ranger

The very first Head Ranger at the then-brand new Lickey Hills Country Park Visitor Centre has retired, *writes Keith Woolford*.

To celebrate his 36 years with Birmingham City Council, Joe Hayden was invited back to Lickey for a farewell reunion.

Joe gave a final speech, in which he said that his time in Lickey was some of the happiest and most satisfying of his career. He ceremoniously planted a tree as part of the event.

Gifts were presented by Steve Hinton, Head of Ranger Services and Sue Ames, Constituency Parks Manager.

Mike Brooke, Chair of The Lickey Hills Society said that Joe "had given the society and other organisations enormous support over the years".

To thank Joe for all of his hard work over the years, including being instrumental in the park receiving the first Green Flag Award, Joe was also gifted a special picture by Simon Woolford (pictured below, right).

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Pictures by Dennis Brown

Scaring the streets

VILLAGERS and visitors came en masse to explore the scarecrow displays and characters at the Alvechurch Scarecrow festival, which returned after a year's hiatus.

It was noted by the community and by Alvechurch Parish Council that more people than ever seemed to be on the streets to see the scarecrows.

Festival organiser Megan Clayton said it was "a great week overall" and more than £1,000 was raised for The Lounge through map sales and entries. A further £250 was raised through the stall outside The Lounge and an additional £450 through cake sales.

A range of categories and prizes were up for grabs. Gru and his minions (below) won the "Best Scarecrow" award, while the "Moter Nature" scarecrow (left) took the popular vote.

The Village sponsored the charity and organisation category which was won by Alvechurch Middle School for their Willy Wonka scarecrow (pictured below, left).

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SIXTH FORM'S NEXT STEP

King's Worcester is celebrating an outstanding, brand new sixth form centre which will enhance pupils' learning, offer new opportunities, fantastic facilities and prepare them for life after sixth form.

KING'S Worcester has unveiled its remarkable new Weston Sixth Form Centre, in a day of celebrations attended by parents, pupils, Old Vigornians and special guests.

The day's activities included the opportunity for current pupils, parents and alumni to tour the stunning new spaces, followed by an official opening ceremony. To share the joy, every senior school pupil enjoyed a celebratory cupcake during morning break.

The school has a long-held reputation of promoting academic excellence as well as developing well-rounded, independent learners, with its holistic approach to education being reflecting in the new centre's design.

A variety of modern study areas, equipped with the latest technology, will offer students the flexibility to study independently or work collaboratively. Additionally, seminar-style classrooms promote interactive and dynamic learning, while the centre's vibrant café provides a relaxed environment for students to take breaks.

The opening ceremony recognised Old Vigornian John Weston for his generous donation to the Sixth Form Centre. Representing him, John Foley joined Acting Head, Dr Alison Oliver, to officially unveil the centre's plaque.

Dr Oliver commented: "The development of our Sixth Form Centre has been driven by a desire to provide our students with the best possible environment for their academic and personal development.

"The facilities are a testament to our commitment to providing a space where our students can thrive, explore their potential, and prepare for the future with confidence."

Flexibility for all: The new study space will provide flexibility for different study styles and group work.

The opening ceremony: Dr Alison Oliver and John Foley unveil the new Weston Sixth Form Centre.

The investment in the Sixth Form Centre sits alongside the recent redevelopment of the Sixth Form Curriculum, offering students an extended curriculum as they enter Higher Education and the world of work.

In addition to A levels and the school's Life Skills Programme, students can now take full advantage of the new KSW Electives Programme, which has been designed to offer enrichment and challenge, enhance employability and provide additional invaluable UCAS points.

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PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Dear Editor – I'm responding to Councillor Adrian Kriss's comments in the November edition of *The Village* on the safety, or lack of it, for pedestrians walking along Sandhills Green in Barnt Green and under the railway bridge. An obvious and simple place to start would be:

1. Removing the 60m stretch of national speed limit at the top of the hill leading to the junction with Coopers Hill. The rest of Sandhills Green, and Coopers Hill have 30mph speed limits. Having this 60m stretch with a 60mph speed limit makes no sense and encourages motorists to drive faster than they otherwise would.

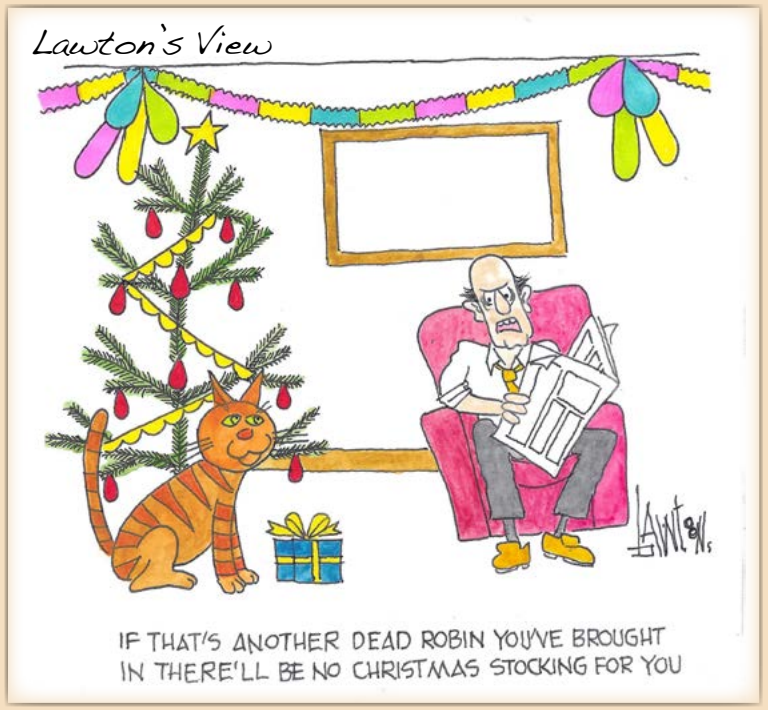
2. Enforcing the 30mph speed limit.

3. Additional white lines down the edge of the road to reduce the apparent width of the road, and hence traffic speed from Sandhills Green roundabout to the railway bridge,

4. And dare I say it, a 20mph speed limit between the Sandhills Green roundabout and the far side of the railway bridge?

None of these would require major structural change and would undoubtedly make it safer for those on foot, bikes and horses.

Simon Gompertz, Barnt Green



STAR LETTER

Simon Gompertz is the recipient of The Village *"Star Letter" award of £25.*

We'll be choosing a Star Letter every issue, so send in your views (email address below) for a chance to win £25.

We'd like to thank November's Star Letter winner who donated their prize money to The Lounge.

Christmas Cheers

Dear Editor – I would like to wish *The Village* a very Happy Christmas and a peaceful and healthy New Year. A big "thank you" from our family and the rest of the residents of Alvechurch and the surrounding villages for a super magazine every month!

My family love it and it gives an insight into our lovely villages and gives residents a chance to vent their grumbles on the letters page plus learning all sorts of interesting facts about where we live.

Some of the businesses featured I personally wouldn't know about if it wasn't for your articles. Well done and keep up the good work!

Elisabeth Aubury, Alvechurch

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Please include your name and address – even if you request them to be withheld from publication.

We reserve the right to edit submissions for reasons of space or legality.

The deadline for the next issue is January 12th 2025.

WHERE'S VINNY?

FOUR-year-old Bibek Singh, from Lickey, shows off the Mini Vinny he won for finding the little creature in November's hunt the hedgehog competition.

If you want to win one for yourself, you'll need to try to find the little hedgehog hiding somewhere in this magazine (the one shown above is just a guide).

Tell us where he's hiding via email – see details on the bottom of the page opposite – and please include your name, age, address and phone number, and we'll draw a winner at random.

The closing date for the December/January Hunt The Hedgehog competition is midnight on 1 January 2025.

We'll let you know if you've won and you can collect your Mini Vinny from our office – and pose for a photo with your prize!

Editor's Note: *We'd like to thank all of our readers and businesses who have supported* The Village *this year and wish you all a very* ***Merry Christmas*** *and* ***Happy New Year****. We're looking forward to supporting more businesses in the new year, and meeting more of our village readers, too. If you have an business, news story or event you'd like to feature in* The Village, *please get in touch.*

The place to live!

Dear Editor – Plymouth Road is quite simply situated on The Lickey… fact (written in response to the letter "The place to live?" in the November issue of *The Village*).

Of course it is the parish boundaries that define where one lives . . .

To be perfectly frank, Google maps was not in existence until 2005 – long after the parish boundaries were established.

So quite clearly Plymouth Road, like Twatling Road and all the side roads leading off, are definitely on The Lickey.

Maps showing parish boundaries quite clearly shows the Parish of Lickey with Blackwell, which is the correct name. The villages, including Barnt Green, are also in Worcestershire not Birmingham or West Midlands as our post codes would suggest.

There are lots of books and other writings about the area which are available for those who want to read up about our lovely parishes and their origins.

Lesley Stanhope, Lickey

Standing tall in the snow: A lovely shot of the monument in The Lickey Hills during the snowy weather in November.

Taken by Lisa Winterbourn, from Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council.

MARCUS AND HIS SUPER POWERS

New books: Marcus hands copies of his books over to librarian Sarah (right) with family friend Rachel Banner.

■ **Find out more about Marcus and his wonderful work – including his art: www.coolart2021.co.uk**

VILLAGE author and entrepreneur Marcus Mason-Williams, has donated copies of two children's books he has written and illustrated to Alvechurch Library.

Marcus, aged 32, of Barnt Green, and is a strong advocate of neurodiversity, set up his business *Cool-Art2021* in 2021, and has worked with the charity the *Special Olympics Great Britain,* a global sports movement to end discrimination against people with intellectual disabilities, since 2015.

Marcus, who is autistic, said: "Someone needs to remind autistic people that we're not helpless and our neurodiversity is not a handicap, but a superpower."

Since 2021, Marcus has written and illustrated two books *Zooland: A Sign of Hope* and *The Horse and the Dragon: Trials of Friendship*, which can be borrowed from Alvechurch Library.

"The two human characters in *The Horse and the Dragon* are autistic," Marcus explains. "One is a farm boy, one is a princess. I've read a few fairy tales and none of them have people who have autism in them, that's why I decided to represent neurodivergent people such as myself."

A keen artist, Marcus has recently been added to the National Highways Social Enterprise Supply list and says he "hopes to be commissioned to produce artwork to support their biodiversity and environmental work".

Visitors to Barnt Green Dental may have seen pieces of Marcus's wildlife artwork in the waiting room.

Marcus hopes to inspire children and other autistic people to achieve their dreams, is a founder member of the government-backed Lilac Review: a campaign to promote the value of disabled-led small businesses and to help overcome some of the challenges they face.

Marcus has been recognised for his work, and has been listed in prestigious *Shaw Trust Disability Power 100* list for 2024.

The awards, which are publicly nominated, celebrate Marcus as one of the 100 most influential disabled individuals in the UK, recognising his impact, innovation and influence in changing the perceptions and stereotypes of disability.

PUPILS AT Lickey Hills Primary School had a special visit from the Bromsgrove Department for Hereford and Worcestershire Fire Service in November. The Reception classes, who had been learning about fire safety and fireworks around Bonfire Night were delighted to be visited by the firefighters, get up close to a real fire engine, and of course, were able to test how loud the siren is.

The firefighters demonstrated all the "gear" they were required to wear, and answered questions from the children about what their work really entailed and how they help keep people safe, from rescuing people locked in their houses to fighting blazing fires.

Jo Reading, early years foundation stage lead at Lickey Hills Primary School, said : "Reception had a wonderful afternoon learning all about what a firefighter does and fire safety.

"We learnt so much and there is much interest in becoming a firefighter when they grow up."

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Let there be lights!

HUNDREDS of villagers gathered in The Square, Alvechurch, for the annual parish council Christmas lights switch on.

As the sun set, the centre of Alvechurch started to fill with families, and The Lounge and Gin and Pickles opened their doors for visitors to warm themselves on mulled wine, pulled pork baps and hot dogs.

Before the crowds gathered to watch the performances, who should appear from The Lounge but Father Christmas! There must be a chimney in the back …

Santa, and a big bucket of sweets, made his way through the many, many village children keen to tell him what they wanted for Christmas – and chat with him about what football teams they support.

Bromsgrove Town Crier Kevin Ward announced the start of the festivities, and everyone gathered to watch the Amy Greaves School of Dance, who entertained the crowd, dancing to a mash-up of popular Christmas tunes, dressed in sparkling, festive Nutcracker-esque uniforms.

Alvechurch Community Choir sang a range of carols, accompanied by live guitar.

Pupils from Crown Meadow First School choir then gave their rendition of some family favourite festive tunes, to the delight of the crowd – many young members of which were seen dancing together in the street with glee.

The countdown to light up the big Christmas tree was soon being led by Santa, to much applause.

While some villagers stayed to continue their drinks in The Square before heading home, much of the crowd then made the short journey to Alvechurch Baptist Church for warm drinks, crafts and more carols.

Clockwise from above: Crown Meadow pupils prepare to sing their Christmas songs. A job well done by Santa Clause. Some very festive youngsters watch the performances. Giggles and mischief in the crowd. Families enjoy the singing. Town Crier Kevin Ward gladly opens the event.

Clockwise from above: The Village Square is packed full of performers and excited villagers. Santa makes his entrance. Alvechurch Community Choir accessorised in red. Santa hands out treats. Amy Greaves School of Dance finish their performance.

Clockwise from above: Bromsgrove Town Crier Kevin Ward introduces Santa. Alvechurch Choir make a second performance at the Baptist Hall. Crown Meadow pupils belt out Christmas songs. Lessons from the choir. A young villager is thrilled to meet Santa. Rev Joey with the Baptist Hall tree. Hot drinks are served with a smile. A very excited, and very festively dressed young villager.

Lights fantastic!

Villagers gather in Millennium Park (above) for the Barnt Green Parish Council Christmas lights switch-on.

Wine on wheels: From Village Vineyards.

Above: Santa and a little helper switch on Barnt Green's lights.

Dylan Grassby (with his sister) is congratulated by Santa on his winning turkey light design.

Abigail Gordon (left) switches on her angel Christmas light design which joins the Barnt Green festive lights.

Dylan Grassby (right) turns on his brightly coloured turkey light with the help of the electrician.

Santa in Blackwell/images by Simon Woolford

SANTA MADE a quick stop at St Catherine's Church in Blackwell to greet the councillors, children and families who had gathered to switch on the Christmas lights. Villagers enjoyed mince pies and mulled wine, which added to the festive occasion.

Two days later, Santa once again visited the parish and delighted the children gathered at The Trinity Church, Lickey, by giving out the prizes to the parish council Christmas jumper competition. Archie Hurcombe, aged 10, won the prize for his winning design (pictured above) which was made into the Parish Council Christmas card.

Blackwell Concert Band and the Lickey Hills Primary School and Nursery Choir entertained the crowds.

Commenting on the successful events, Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council said: "Many thanks to all who attended and to all of the children who entered the competition. A big thank you to Santa for being the guest of honour."

Crowds gather for Rowney Green Lights Up

Rowney Green residents were visited by Santa and special guests for Rowney Green Lights Up. The event, which is organised by the Rowney Green Peace Hall Trustees, drew a big crowd who saw the special guests and were entertained by a children's choir.

Pictures by Wendy Easter, Becky Easter and Asker Jeukendrup

NO PLACE LIKE LEILA HOME

Discover **Leila Home Interiors**, the new design studio in Barnt Green. Step into a world of beautifully curated homeware, decor and furniture, and find out more about how you can create your home design dreams.

ANYONE who has strolled down Barnt Green high street recently, might have spotted a new arrival and wondered what was inside when *Leila Home Interiors* opened their doors in November.

Leila Home Interiors offers a range of services to help you achieve the home of your dreams, from 1:1 interior consultancy and full interior design consultancy to a beautiful shopping experience with a range of luxurious, yet affordable, homeware and gifts.

The woman behind the shop is Samantha Chorley, from Barnt Green, who opened Leila Home Interiors in 2017. She met with *The Village* to tell us more about what her team does and what visitors can expect when they step through the green doors.

Sat in a stunning, handmade cream loveseat, Sam explained that while she hadn't been searching for a site, when the opportunity to open a shop in Barnt Green arose, she knew she could create something special: "I believe in fate, and I'm grateful to Di for making it so easy *[who villagers may know was the previous owner, of the shop Continental Collections]*, she's been amazing."

With an extensive background in interior design, and a fantastic location available on Barnt Green High Street, this was the perfect opportunity to showcase the services and pieces on offer at Leila Home Interiors.

Sam opened the shop, with the belief that it is "important for people to come in and feel the quality of the products we produce". As those who have been inside will know, it is immediately evident that the range and quality of the homeware, fabrics and decorations are expertly made, curated and designed thoughtfully and of the highest quality.

Above: Spot the new green and gold shop front.
Right: A treasure trove of furniture and decor awaits.
Below: From lamps to artwork, the shop is full of beautiful pieces.

Leila Homes Interiors isn't *just* a shop with fantastic furniture and decor, they are proud to offer a range of services, and a team of interior designers to suit every style and taste, from modern first-time buyers, to historic Georgian homes.

"I don't believe that one style fits all. A lot of interior designers have a look, and that's great but I don't believe in that," Sam said, "we adapt our style to what the client wants, not the client adapting their style to what we do.

"When you come into the shop, don't ask us what we have in stock, tell us what you like. We will adapt to whatever style you want."

Sam and her team of designers bring a wealth of experience working with developers and show homes, estate agents and many residential clients over the years. Their knowledge and expertise are available to help create the home (or room) you have always dreamt of, but not known where to start.

Services include hourly consultancy sessions on-site where one of the team will take you through pieces that go together.

A full interior design service is available for anyone wanting some help redesigning and styling a room, or the whole house, no job is too big or too small.

There is even a computer generated design service – Sam explained: "if you were to take a picture of your room, you can bring that in and one of the team can design it for you, putting pieces in place using CGI giving you the choice and freedom to buy from wherever you like."

You can book in to discuss window dressings including curtains and blinds, and designing bespoke furniture for your home.

For those who are interested in creating their own beautiful bespoke pieces, everything at Leila Home Interiors is under one roof, from initial consultation all the way through to delivery.

Sam told *The Village* that they make all of their own furnishings, from sofas and chairs to curtains and headboards. Their design room in store has nearly "every fabric under the sun" to allow you to create a truly unique piece to suit your taste and style.

"I've always been about affordable

design," Sam says. "Our pieces are really good quality and they're handmade – we make them ourselves, nothing is imported and you're probably going to spend less than you would in a bigger department store.

"Already people have looked around the store and are surprised by the cost, which I'm glad about!"

Now that the shop is open, Sam is looking forward to welcoming villagers through the doors, supporting local businesses and embracing the community.

Having already been very busy in the shop, she said: "There really is a sense of community in Barnt Green. It's lovely to meet people and have a chat.

"The shop is open to anyone – whether you need a Christmas gift or you're redesigning your home, we would love to help."

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from everyone at
Beoley Parish Council

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Christmas
from
Alvechurch Reiki

Merry Christmas
and Happy New Year
to all customers, from
Coopers Hill Farm

Wishing you all a
Merry Christmas
and a happy and healthy New Year.
From **Bradley Thomas**,
your MP for
Bromsgrove

Alvechurch Parish Council
wishes everyone a
very
Merry Christmas

BĒO
Bespoke Jewellery

Sending a smile from
Better Together
Merry Christmas

Seasons Greetings
to you all, and a very Happy New Year.
From **Adrian Kriss**, County Councillor for Beacon

Everyone at
The Village
wishes you a very
Merry Christmas
including
Vinny!

Merry Christmas
from Mark Meads and the team at
Village Financial

Wishing everyone
a safe and healthy
Festive season
from your Independent District Councillor
Rachael Bailes

Merry Christmas
ppm financial planning

Merry Christmas
from
The Weighbridge Inn
Pop in for a pint over the festive period!

Merry Christmas
from the
Amy Greaves School of Dance

Merry Christmas
from Independent Parish & District Councillor
Charlie Hotham

Merry Christmas
and Happy New Year
from all the team at
Lunatips Nails & Beauty

Seasons Greetings
from everyone at
Cofton Park Manor
We hope you have a happy new year and look forward to seeing you in 2025.

Merry Christmas
from everyone at
Barnt Green Parish Council

Merry Christmas
from
The Village Butchers
pop in for your meat and poultry over the festive period!

Merry Christmas
and Happy New Year, from
Lickey & Blackwell Parish Council

Merry Christmas
and a healthy New Year
from your Independent District Councillor
Alan Bailes

Merry Christmas
from everyone at
Hillscourt Hotel
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Wishing you all a
Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year, filled with love, hope and prosperity.
Aled Luckman
County Councillor for Alvechurch

20 Years Ago

From **The Village** archive

OUR COMBINED Dec 04/Jan 05 cover showed, as was now traditional, a selection of people who had appeared in the magazine in the past year. Inside, readers were encouraged to buy the first-ever *Village* calendar!

IN THE NEWS: Blackwell First School was going into a new calendar year with a new headmaster – Ian Howells, former deputy head at Hockley Heath Primary School, was described as an "exciting" teacher.

Elsewhere, the women's toilets at Alvechurch Village Hall were to receive a £3,800 upgrade thanks to the proceeds from a sale and raffle and a donation of £1,000 from one anonymous villager.

COMMUNITY LIBRARY Co-ordinator Di Morgan prepares to plant daffodil bulbs donated by her parents Eric and Ivy Morgan (above) at Cofton Hackett Library to mark its 35th year on the site in 2005. Di, who had worked there for 30 of those years, hoped the flowers would add a splash of colour in the spring.

ALVECHURCH FC had a new kit sponsor in the shape of local business Direct Windows and Conservatories, whose owner Kevin Hudson (right) is pictured with club Chairman Peter Eacock.

10 Years Ago

From **The Village** archive

CAN YOU SEE YOURSELF? By 2014 people were clamouring to get their faces on our cover baubles and even offering financial inducements (maybe we should do that to raise money for charity next year?) As it was, the cover carried the usual selection of faces that had appeared in the magazine over the previous year.

BROMSGROVE District Council was criticised by the Local Government Ombudsman for failing to look into residents' complaints of overtipping of spoil on the southern slopes of the Lickey Hills.

The ombudsman ordered the council to pay compensation to the resident who brought the failure to act over activity at the former Marlbrook Tip to his attention.

"As residents continued to report concerns, I consider the council should have looked into the true state of tipping on the site by the end of 2006-beginning of 2007. Failure to do so is fault."

CRIMINALS BEWARE! Neighbourhood Watch groups were making their presence known, with new signage down Latimer Road, Alvechurch (left), and new recruits on the growing estate in Cofton Hackett (below).

ST ANDREW'S Church in Barnt Green held an exhibition of First World War memorabilia, lent by parishioners whose ancestors were involved in the conflict, including John Talbot's *Active Service Testament* (left), said to have saved his life by stopping a bullet.

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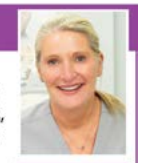

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Words by Mike Sharpe

The Rousler dives into Bromsgrove history

THE latest edition of *The Bromsgrove Rousler*, the local history magazine published by the Bromsgrove Society every year since 1986, is now available.

The 2024 edition – number 39 in the series – features personalities and events that have helped shape Bromsgrove's history.

This issue tells the story of Bromsgrove resident Eddie Palmer, who joined the Royal Navy at 15 and trained as a torpedo technician. Following his death in July 2024 aged 101, local historian Neil Beaumont tells his story, and investigates his life including his involvement in the 1941 hunt for the German battleship Bismarck and his time terving in Malta and North Africa.

Also profiled in this issue are the Caulcott sisters; Margaret, Lilian and Bet who were all nurses and carers between the wars including at the Bromsgrove Cottage Hospital. Their great-nephew Rob Hudson has been investigating their lives and work in the Bromsgrove area during and after the war.

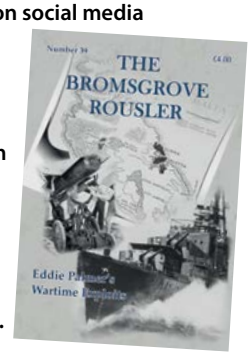
Other articles include a dive into the history of All Saints' Church in Burcot Lane, which marked its 150th anniversary this year, and a look at their role in the community today.

Celebrations have also been taking place at Bromsgrove's Methodist Church Centre on Stratford Raod. In this article, Jenny Harding explores the history of Methodism in Bromsgrove and how the Church Centre came about.

Readers will learn the story of Webbs of Wychbold, as told by Dianna Clutterbuck, who describes how a small seed supplier from Stourbridge grew into one of the country's largest garden centres.

The picture article in this year's issue contains a collection of postcards acquired by the Society from the Bromsgrove area.

■ **The Rousler is available through the Society's website www.bsoc.co.uk and on social media @bromsgrovesoc. It is also available, for £4, from a wide range of retail and other outlets across the district.**



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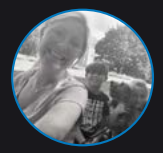

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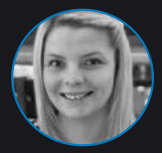

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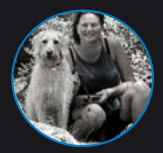

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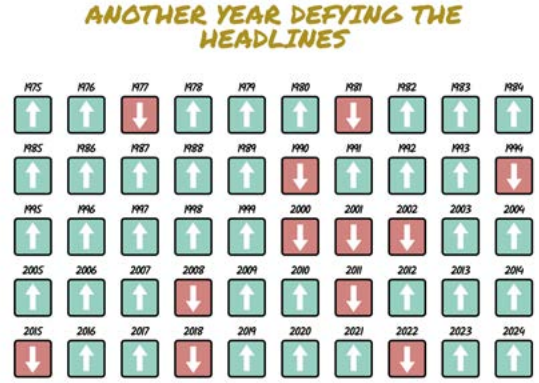
ANOTHER YEAR MARKETS DEFIED THE HEADLINES

Martin Pryor reflects on the last year and how financial planners can help you to achieve your financial goals in the New Year.



AS we reach the end of 2024, financial advisers have much to reflect on and celebrate. Global equity portfolios (year to date) have delivered returns of between 20% and 25% despite a backdrop of world events that may have swayed less disciplined investors to abandon ship.

From ongoing wars to the emergence of new conflicts, alongside UK and US elections dominating the news, 2024 has served up plenty of uncertainty.

Yet, once again, the stock market (the great companies we use every day) has reminded us of an essential truth: it operates independently of the daily noise. They're real companies, selling real things, to real people.

In an environment with as much uncertainty as this year, the ability of financial advisers to anchor themselves and their clients to a well-thought-out, long-term plan has been crucial.

This year is a testament to the power of staying the course.

CELEBRATING DISCIPLINE

For many clients, 2024 may have felt emotionally turbulent. Negative headlines can make it easy to assume that financial markets will inevitably suffer.

However, as advisers, we understand the stock market's resilience and capacity to price in events more efficiently than we often give it credit for.

Our role is to counterbalance fear with perspective, ensuring that the families we serve remain disciplined and focused on the bigger picture. Staying invested meant that our clients not only avoided the costs of emotional decision-making but also reaped the rewards of a remarkably strong market year. The patience and discipline that we, as financial professionals, instill in our clients is invaluable.

RECOGNISING THE WINS

Now is the perfect time to take stock of what we've collectively achieved. Keeping client families invested and focused through the noise has delivered exceptional results – not just in terms of returns, but in the peace of mind that comes from knowing their financial plans are on track.

We should also take a moment to appreciate the work we've done. It's not always easy to hold steady in uncertain times, but our ability to do so has given our clients one of the best gifts possible: financial peace of mind.

LOOKING AHEAD

It's important for us to remember a timeless truth: markets are unpredictable and unknowable in the short term but remarkably consistent over the long term.

As we move into 2025, let's continue to focus on what we can control – maintaining robust financial plans, encouraging disciplined investing, and reminding our clients that staying in their seats is often the hardest yet most rewarding decision they'll make.

With two years of great returns now behind us, let's help our clients to maintain realistic expectations, be prepared for temporary declines, and to stay focused on the long term at all times.

Here's to another year of doing what we do best: helping families achieve their financial goals, no matter the headlines.

The team at PPM Financial Planning would like to wish you all a happy Christmas and thank those readers who have engaged with us during 2024.

Martin Pryor
Lifestyle Financial Planner

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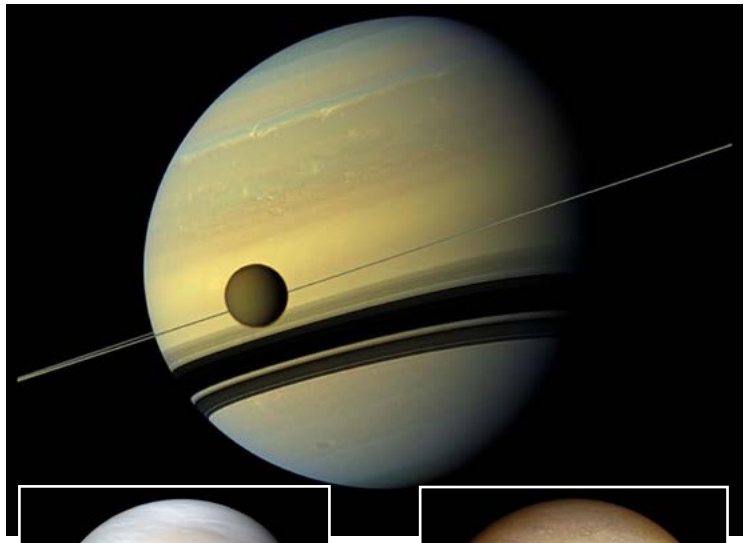
This article should not be regarded as personal advice. You should seek independent financial advice to apply these theories to your circumstances.

GODS OF THE SKIES

Amateur astronomer **Brian Watkiss** peers into the *Village* night sky.



The planets, clockwise from above: Saturn and its largest moon, Titan. Jupiter and its moon Ganymede. Venus from Mariner 10.
Images/NASA

DECEMBER, the darkest month of the year but also, in the minds of some, the brightest. The Sun sets before 4pm for most of the month and is at its noon lowest on the 21st: the Winter Solstice, when the day is just over seven and a half hours long.

However, at sunset, we can see the very brightest of planets: Venus. It's visible in the southwest from a little after 4pm until it sets around 7pm. It will actually dominate this part of the sky being so bright and can take on quite a mysterious appearance if it dances between moving clouds.

We get its name from the Roman goddess of love and that seems somehow appropriate, given that it is the hottest planet in the Solar System with a surface temperature approaching 500C. That, combined with the enormous atmospheric pressure on the surface, means that landing on the surface is very difficult and only the Russians have ever succeeded, several times in fact although all the probes only lasted for less than an hour.

As our skies darken, another planet starts to appear just above and a little left of Venus. This is the most beautiful of planets, Saturn. It's much trickier to spot but is about the same height as the bright star Altair, over to the right and it sits in line with the right hand side of the square of Pegasus above.

Named after the Roman god of agriculture and wealth (do those two things go together?), he was also the father of the god Jupiter (don't you just hate it when your son turns out bigger than yourself!).

Despite its size, it's mostly just a ball of Helium and Hydrogen although very little of it is gaseous. The pressures below the cloud tops are such that Hydrogen is in liquid form initially, becoming a solid metallic form in the deeper layers.

It's most famous, of course, for its rings which, although being hundreds of thousands miles across are only about 30 feet thick but nonetheless an amazing sight through a telescope.

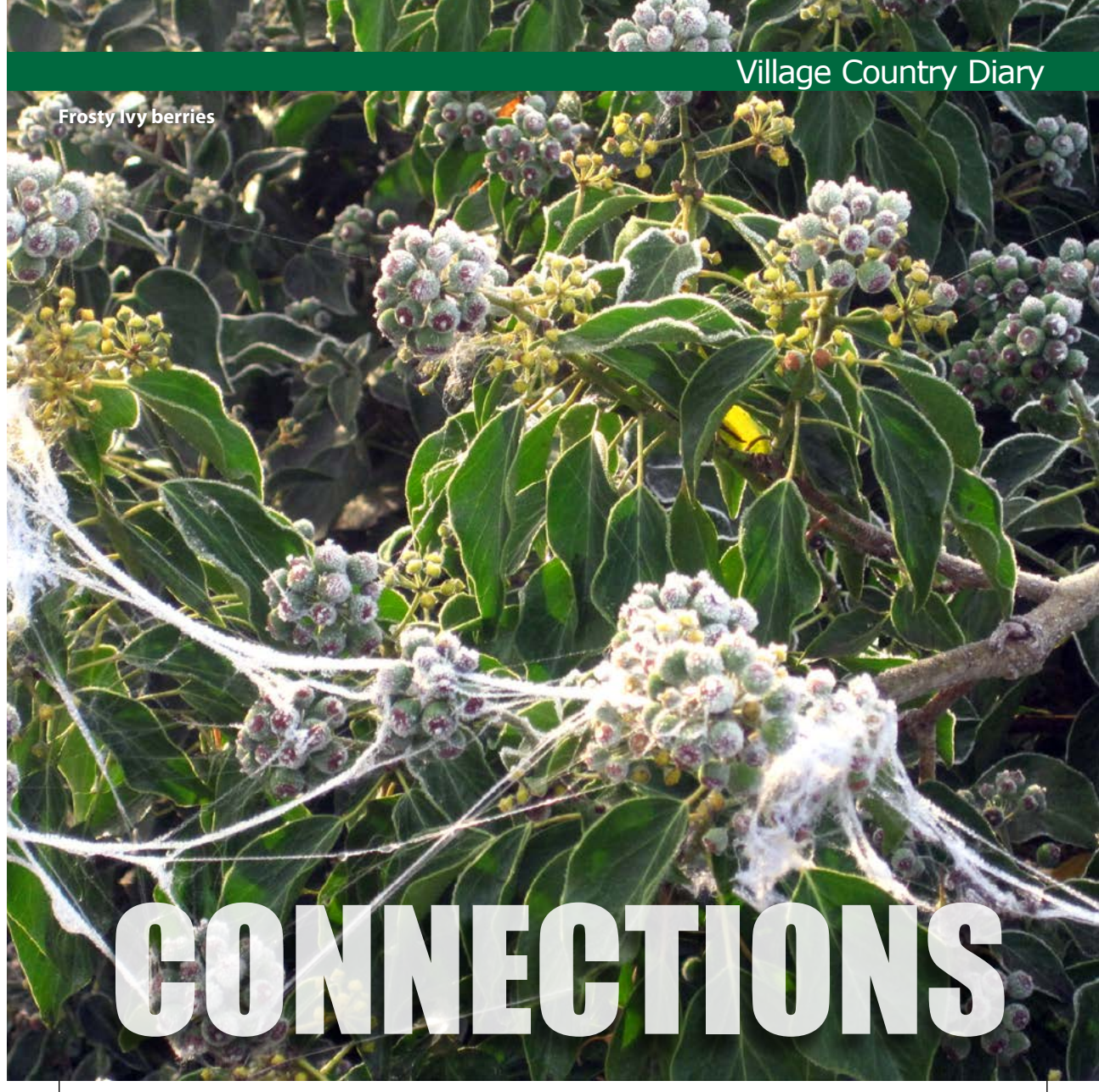
By now, you will have noticed the third in our triplet of superlative planets, Jupiter. Over in the southeast in the early evening, it will have taken over from Venus in being the brightest object in the sky, apart from the Moon, of course. It is sitting in the constellation of Taurus, quite close to its brightest star, Aldebaran, the reddish hue of which giving a clue to the fact that it is a red giant.

Named after the Roman king of all the gods, Jupiter is the largest planet in our Solar System but, again, consisting mostly of Hydrogen and Helium – just a lot more of it. It has four large moons which are easily visible through a telescope or even with a good pair of binoculars and it's fascinating to watch their relative positions change during the course of an evening.

Jupiter is in our evening skies for many months and as we go into the new year, another superlative planet becomes obvious.

In the meantime, on the 24th, don't forget to check the NORAD website noradsanta.org to follow any interesting flying objects that might be about that evening.

Have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



Frosty ivy berries

CONNECTIONS

IT'S been a strange year for the natural world, largely because of the unusually wet early months and the mild autumn – a classic "St Luke's little summer" in late October.

The leaves started late turning colour on the trees but then speeded up. In October you could see clearly which ash trees were suffering from dieback as they lost their leaves rapidly, whereas healthy trees went beautifully golden quite late.

This year I have written about how human beings have divided up the natural world to understand it, looking at the different Kingdoms, Families, Genera and Species around us. This month I am looking at how all these things are connected together, because it can be misleading to treat them separately.

This month **Mary Green** discusses the connections between the Kingdoms, in particular the festive ties of holly and ivy.

One of the reasons we are in such a nature-depleted state in the world is that people have ignored the importance of maintaining the whole

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network of nature, not just parts of it.

Recent reports have talked again of how our "wildlife" has decreased, the main reason being its "habitat."

But I think it's a mistake to think of the animal kingdom as wildlife and the plants and fungi as being their habitat. All creatures are habitat for each other and depend on each other – and that includes microscopic organisms like bacteria that I haven't really written about as I don't know enough about them!

It's more useful if we are to reverse the decline in species to think of the whole of life as interlinked, part of a three-dimensional web or one huge living organism. And it isn't enough just to consider living beings: other parts of our planet like the underlying rocks affect our life, as of course do the tides of the ocean, the climate and the weather.

At this time of year we often think of the natural world as "dying down" for the winter but really it's either becoming dormant or recycling.

Even when things individually die they do not disappear and are taken back into the ecosystem, for example by fungi recycling dead plant and animal material. We should not clear up fallen leaves or cut off flower heads too readily – they are much better disappearing gradually back into the soil and helping next year's plants grow.

The natural world isn't "wild" in the sense of being unstructured or untidy, though people often talk of it this way. It has a complex of patterns and structures that keep it alive and developing.

Unfortunately we humans interfere with these patterns in our agriculture, infrastructure and even in our gardening. We can develop ways of living that are more in harmony with natural patterns though, so we don't have to be pessimistic.

To see some examples of how everything depends on each other, I'll start with the seasonally apt holly and ivy.

Ivy is one of our most common plants, a vital part of our ecology, though often misunderstood. It is a climbing flowering plant, and is evergreen, which is why it is part of our Christmas and winter mythology. It depends on trees to climb up towards the light, though it will also grow on human-made structures.

Festive symbols: A robin perches on an ivy hedge.

A feast of berries: A wood pigeon eats ivy berries.

It is not parasitic so does not harm trees – indeed, there is evidence that it protects them. If a tree is weak or dying then the weight of ivy may bring it down, but that helps the process of old plants dying back into the system.

Ivy is the last native flower to bloom in our year, flowering in September. The flowers are pollinated especially by wasps, and other insects like hoverflies and butterflies feed on their nectar, keeping insects alive late in the year when other flowers have finished.

Brightly coloured: Brimstone butterfly on purple loosestrife.

They are also the hibernating place for the brimstone butterfly. This yellow butterfly hangs up in ivy looking like a dead leaf throughout the winter. It wakes up and lays its eggs in spring on buckthorn and during that time takes nectar from yellow flowers like primroses.

When the new butterflies emerge from their larvae in late summer, they feed on nectar from purple and pink flowers like purple loosestrife and willow herb before hanging up to sleep in the ivy. So, all this complex of plants need to be there for this one species of butterfly. Fortunately, they are here where I live.

The black ivy berries ripen in the winter, later than others, and provide food for birds – woodpigeons especially seem to like them.

As with other trees such as yew, the berries are poisonous to humans, but birds' digestion is different. They digest the fleshy parts of berries and pass the seeds straight through – so they help the ivy by spreading its seeds.

In spring and summer new leaves begin to grow on ivy plants – they do shed leaves throughout the year. New and older leaves can look quite different, the mature ones being smooth and heart-shaped, younger ones the familiar more lobed ivy shape.

The leaves at the right stage are special food plants for the larvae of several butterflies, especially the holly blue which feeds on tender leaves and flower buds in early autumn.

The Woodland Trust say ivy supports at least 50 different species of creatures, as well as maintaining the structures of hedgerows and protecting trees.

Sometimes you can see where ivy has become unbalanced due to human intervention. If we cut a hedge year after year and stop the native trees in it from flowering and fruiting, especially hawthorn hedges, they weaken. Ivy may take over on them, covering them and further weakening them by cutting out light.

To some extent the ivy compensates for the lack of flowers and fruit on the hedge, but only for a limited time each year.

Holly blue butterfly: Not quite the same colour as holly berries.

Where a hedge is healthy and its trees have fruit and flowers (for example, blackthorn flowering in March, hawthorn in May and elder in June) the ivy flowers appear after the others and make a lovely continuity of food for everything else. No wonder our folklore sees ivy as one of the symbols of eternal life.

Holly is our most common native evergreen tree in the Midlands, and can grow quite big. It is much used as a hedge though, as it is so dense and prickly, and often cut too much to be useful to other creatures as it can't flower and fruit.

Like ivy, the leaves come in two forms. The young and lower branches are prickly, the older and higher ones smooth. The prickles are to prevent it being browsed and eaten by mammals. Upper branches used to be cut and used for cattle feed in winter, so it is a good food. Cutting hedges keeps them prickly but decreases their use in the environment.

When the flower buds are young, the holly blue butterfly larvae feed on these. So you see them in May on holly and August on ivy. Holly's attractive small white clusters of flowers in May are full of nectar and pollen and feed many Insects. The young leaves and buds are eaten by larvae of other insects as well, some of which will only eat holly.

Though all holly can flower, the male and female are separate, so only female trees have berries. You need to have both sexes of tree reasonably nearby for them to really thrive. There are not so many berries as usual this year, probably due to the lack of pollinating insects in spring.

Holly grows as "understory" in woodland. This means it grows underneath the taller trees, and does not mind being in their shade some of the year. It has flowers earlier than ivy because of this – before the deciduous trees have leaf cover.

Prickly shrubs as understory are very helpful to the bigger trees. There

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Village Country Diary

A pop of red: Holly bush with plentiful berries.

Less common than red: Yellow berried holly.

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is an old saying "the thorn is mother of the oak." This is because young oaks naturally grow with thorny shrubs around them (hawthorn, holly, blackthorn).

Oak grows slowly and in its young stage would be browsed by deer, and originally by wild cattle and horses. The thorn bushes protect it till it is big enough to be inedible to them, and then continue to grow below them. You can see this well in old woodland like Sandhills Wood up Cooper's Hill.

Like other evergreens, even non-native ones, holly provides shelter for birds and mammals in the winter when other trees are bare.

Holly berries are very obviously good food for birds. You can see flocks of them stripping the berries in late autumn or early winter, a little later than some of the other berries - depending on the weather and when they ripen. Especially, thrush family birds enjoy them – thrushes (in particular mistle-thrushes), redwings and fieldfares – finding them when the crop of hawthorn berries is over.

Holly is even more part of our winter and even Christian mythology. It was seen as the winter king of the woods ("The holly bears the crown") with the oak being he summer king. Because of this and its red midwinter berries, it became linked with Christ the King.

I will be singing the Sans Day carol, one version of "The Holly and the Ivy," this month and will think of the connections between our culture and the plants of our natural world.

Our churchyard in Alvechurch has a huge holly (with not so many berries as usual this year) and an unusual yellow berried one (pictured on p39), and an ancient oak covered with ivy, as well as its ancient evergreen yew.

Both holly and ivy grow from their roots in soil and are tolerant of different soil types. They will be linked under the ground with fungal networks, though they don't have very specific fungi associated with them. Their tough leaves, shed through the year, take longer to rot down than deciduous trees, and continue to provide nourishment into the soil when broken down by fungi and bacteria throughout the year.

Meanwhile, all the species which live on and with them will also be visiting other plants or feeding other animals – or feeding off them!

The birds will eat the insects as well as spreading the seeds. Small mammals may eat berries and invertebrates. The insects will eat leaves as well as pollinating flowers. Bigger birds may eat smaller birds and mammals. If we upset any part of the web, we upset the whole.

A lot is said about the healing properties of "being in nature". I think this only works when we can walk somewhere where there is a complexity of species growing together, and when we can use all our senses to observe and feel the details and the changes during the year.

Even in the middle of winter when things are quiet you can hear the robin singing and the woodpigeon calling, smell the leaf-mould and see and feel the buds developing on the trees.

An ivy covered oak: Standing tall by Alvechurch train station.

■ **I wrote this poem (below) a few years ago about a man who understood how everything in this world is linked together.**

Centenary

James Lovelock was born a hundred years ago.
I heard him, talking like a young one still
About inventing the concept of Gaia. He said
"I was walking by the sea with my friend
Bill Golding" (that's William to you). "Bill said
You need to give it a name. Call it Gaia
I thought he said gyre, g-y-r-e, and was confused
And then I got it." He certainly did.
Odd thing for an engineer to invent
And for a misogynistic novelist to name
A woman goddess as the life of the earth.
She is a self-regenerating organism
Held together by complex bonds,
Systems we are slowly understanding.
We are all in her, but if we hurt her too much
She will shrug us off and fill in our gap.
But I think she would like us to stay
Along with the fungi, the midges and rats
And all the other weeds and pests and vermin,
Like engineers and poets, who make her
And without whom we won't survive.

The anonymous birder

How to enjoy village birdlife

LET'S TALK TURKEY

As I am writing this in late November, Americans are preparing for Thanksgiving, commemorating the feast of the Pilgrims and the indigenous Wampanoag in 1621, giving thanks for surviving their first year in the New World.

It is highly likely that reports of the "huge, roasted bird" as the centrepiece of the celebration was a turkey.

This ultimately spelled rather bad fortune for the bird as, today, it is estimated that somewhere between 250 to 300 million turkeys will be consumed in the US this year, most over Thanksgiving and Christmas, with a paltry (ahem) 10 million in the UK and Ireland. Several countries in South America as well as Canada, New Zealand, Australia and France join the turkey fest.

Ironically the only domesticated turkey that is guaranteed survival is the one annually presented to the US president, who as tradition has it, grants it a presidential pardon allowing the fortunate bird to live out its days unplucked. Let's hope that continues.

So how did the turkey assume this prominence (vegetarians and vegans excepted) in the Christmas meal?

Practically, it is a large bird, relatively easy to catch that feeds a large number of people at one sitting. Like all domesticated animals its ancestors are wild and have been around for 20million years.

It is the largest of the classification "Galliformes" or game birds. It originates from the American continent and the Yucatan Peninsula (you may recall the Ian Dury lyric) was known as the *Land of the Turkey* (or their equivalent name) by the Mayans.

Domestication of the wild bird occurred in southern Mexico and the Mayans were possibly the first people to use it in celebrations. Archeologists have found numerous remnants of turkey bones in Mayan areas dated earlier than 300 BC.

Fast forward to the 1500s and the Spanish arrival in South America, which ultimately led to the bird being introduced back in Europe. Although chicken and geese had been domesticated for between 5,000 – 7,000 years, the novelty of turkey caught on and moved north through Europe eventually reaching Britain.

Gobble gobble: A "pet" turkey, spared from market by a farmer.
Image/Mary Green

Legend has it that the explorer William Srickland was the first to bring six turkeys, traded with native Americans, to Bristol in 1526.

The use of turkey as a farmed bird burgeoned, East Anglia a particular stronghold, and by the mid-1800s vast flocks would be walked miles to market in the cities.

There would be overnight camps with the birds being guarded and strangest of all, prior to setting off, the practice of dipping their feet in tar and then sand would provide them with little "turkey trainers" to protect their feet on the long journeys.

There is also some evidence to indicate that turkey represented higher status at the Victorian Christmas dinner table. In *A Christmas Carol* (1843) the Cratchit family are given a turkey by the reformed Scrooge to replace their humble goose and Queen Victoria herself tucked into her first in 1851. Any Dickensian reference to Christmas tradition was bound to soar in popularity.

As a wild bird of the Americas it seems strange that they would have the name "Turkey". The theory is that the settlers to America thought the large wild birds they saw were like the guinea fowl imported from Africa to Europe by mainly Turkish traders. Anything exotic often had the word Turkish attached to it, so guinea fowl became known as turkey coqs or hennes, shortened to turkey and the name caught on through Old World connection to the New World.

The native Americans would have their own names for the bird and the scientific name for wild turkey, Meleagris gallapavo means "Peafowl, cock like guinea fowl". Let's stick to turkey, shall we, however inaccurate.

Like most animals and particularly birds which become attractive to hunt and eat, the wild turkey found itself going rapidly the way of the Dodo until more than $400 million was spent on breeding and reintroduction programmes to save this American icon.

A comforting thought as we tuck into our festive feasts.

Seasons greetings to all readers. If any readers would like to do a walk identifying our winter visitors and resident birds please contact the editor at editor@villageonline.co.uk.

JL

BRING THE GARDEN INSIDE THIS WINTER

As we spend less time in our gardens this season, Leighanne Gee from **Fern 'n' Furl** tells *The Village* all about Terraniums, while her husband Andy shows how to create your own indoor garden to enjoy over the colder months.

WE were forecast snow in November, but I must admit that I didn't really believe it would come until I saw it for myself.

It seems that years of reading doom-and-gloom headline prophecies of nationwide snowstorms and Arctic blasts fit to bury us in drifts of the white stuff, only to wake up to a dull, overcast sky, have numbed me to the reality that it is actually still possible for us to get snow before Christmas . . . if at all!

Create your own mini ecosystem: with a terranium

While this may have scuppered our plans to work outdoors, we caught up with admin and, more interestingly, planted up a terrarium.

Originally called a "Wardian case" (after Dr Bagshaw-Ward), wooden framed terrariums were used by plant hunters to transport plants from Asia, predominantly China, back to botanical gardens, plant nurseries and private collectors here in the UK. Expeditions were commissioned to bring back thousands of unknown, tropical plants in a race to be first.

Before the introduction of the Wardian case, the conditions aboard the ships were so unfavourable that only the toughest 2% of specimens survived the months at sea.

The enclosed glass structures created a micro-climate; regulating the temperature and moisture levels as well as providing protection from sea spray.

Although simple in design, they were incredibly effective, raising the survival rate of plant specimens to a massive 80%.

Plant nurseries propagated them for the masses, transforming British gardens of the time – those rare, exotic gems from China?

They're now some of the most commonly used plants in garden design: rhododendrons, camellias, magnolias, acers and more.

In time, the need for terrariums became redundant and more recently they've become a popular way to grow and display plants indoors.

They may have an impressive history, and look a bit intimidating, but with some patience and a steady hand, you can create your own mini ecosystem.

There's a lot of information out there about soil mixes and techniques, by people who have beautiful examples that work, so don't worry too much if you don't have

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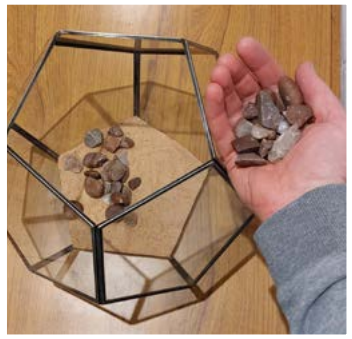

The soak away: Sand and stones work well.

Complete the drainage: Add a layer of grit.

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Compost for plants: Add this on top of the grit.

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quite the exact same materials as us. But here is a step–by–step guide on how to get started . . .

BUILD YOUR OWN TERRANIUM

Choose a container that will allow 10–15cm of planting depth, as well as the height of the plants. Too shallow and the plants will poke up out of the top.

Whether you choose a lidded or an open container, they look best when they have a little space between the top of the plants and the lip of the container.

Andy used the following "ingredients" to build the terrarium, feel free to follow his "recipe":

- Sand
- Pebbles
- Grit
- Charcoal
- Compost
- Decorative grit

However you build yours, try to keep the layers neat and even as you go, just like you would if you were making a lasagne or tiramisu!

You'll need to start with the "soak away", any excess water will eventually sit here so don't be tempted to scrimp – Andy used a thick layer of sand (roughly 2cm deep).

Then he covered that with some chunky pebbles, being careful not to break the glass (rinsed stones from the garden will work fine if you don't have them to hand).

Next, he added a layer of grit,

Use a spoon to firm compost: Once you've added your plants.

which filled the gaps between the pebbles before sitting about 1cm thick. This completes the drainage portion – it may look excessive but given that there are no drainage holes, terrariums filled with compost alone would need precision watering to prevent root rot.

Good drainage greatly reduces that risk, but if you're wondering whether it'll still smell damp, worry not! A layer of charcoal works wonders at neutralising odours and bacteria build up as it's an effective filter.

If you've made it this far, don't worry, just a few steps to go!

We bought a small bag of cacti compost, but you could add sand and grit to a general compost if you have them available. Or if you'd prefer to use mini houseplants with lush foliage instead, swap the gritty cactus compost for general houseplant compost.

Andy added a generous amount of compost, deep enough to sink the plants and cover the roots. He laid the plants out to make sure that they'd fit, before carefully planting them (wearing gloves), using a spoon to firm the compost around them. This step was the trickiest as the plants are difficult to handle - a few bamboo skewers came in handy to keep them upright.

Once they were all planted, and skewers removed, he added the final layer of grit, we chose light, decorative grit but you can be as creative as you like here. Coloured chippings, glass beads, sea shells, use whatever you fancy.

If you're making this with kids in

A final layer of grit: You can be creative with colours here.

Enjoy your slice of nature: But make sure to check on the cacti.

mind and have a spare tiny plastic figure available, sink the base/their feet into this layer to secure it. Just imagine those dinosaurs, unicorns or farmyard animals roaming around in their new world!

Your plants will need to be watered in so that they can settle into their new home. Don't worry if the level of the terrarium drops a little while you do this.

Check cacti plants every couple of weeks, and houseplants once a week to see if they need water.

If you're unsure, poke a finger down into the compost layer and check if it feels damp, if so, leave it a few days longer.

For more information about Fern 'n' Furl, get in touch with Leighanne for a free garden visit at lanny@fernnfurl.com or you can call 07749 509 934.

EVENTS

THE MIDLAND SINFONIA continues the 2024/25 season on 14th December at 3pm at St George's C of E Church Worcester with a CHRISTMAS FAMILY CONCERT, a fun-filled seasonal afternoon of music for all the family including the story of The Nutcracker set to music by Tchaikovsky. On 8th February, back at the Ark St Laurence Church Alvechurch, at 3pm they will hold MUSIC FOR STAGE AND SCREEN. A selection of music used in and original scores written for stage and screen, including Mahler's 'Adagietto' (Death in Venice), Barber's 'Adagio' (Platoon) and highlights from Wicked and The Greatest Showman. Tickets and information www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk. Merry Christmas and a happy new year to all.

THE ASKLEPIOS ORCHESTRA ask you to save the Date of their Spring Concert, which will be on 13th April 2025 in the same venue.

ALVECHURCH BAPTIST CHURCH will be holding a celebration for 12th night. Comedians and Carols on 4th January at 7.30pm. Starring Paul Kerensa and Tony Vino (professional standups). In the church, refreshments included. Tickets from 07870 915872 or the Lounge.

MUSIC

ALVECHURCH COMMUNITY CHOIR usually meets in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mondays at 7.30pm with occasional pub and outdoor sessions and a live stream. The choir is inclusive and open to everyone, whether you think you can sing or not. New members are always welcome. For more information or to join or book them, see their website www.alvechurchcommunitychoir.org.uk. They meet in the Village Hall on 16 December. Their 2025 sessions start on 6 January in the Village Hall

BEOLEY VILLAGE HALL hosts live music, comedy, cinema and jazz nights. On Wednesday Jazz nights the bar opens at 7.45pm, with entertainment from 8.15pm. For Friday night events, the bar opens at 7pm with entertainment from 7.30pm, and on Saturdays the bar opens at 7.15pm with entertainment from 8pm. For more information and details, contact Paul on 07973 759340 or Richard 01527 66646.

BEL CANTO SINGERS, the well-known 4-part Worcestershire choir, rehearse at St. John's Church, Redditch B98 7PZ on Monday evenings. They are always happy to welcome new singers. Just turn up at rehearsal on Mondays at 7.30pm where there will be a wide range of singing activities, light refreshments and chat. More information please contact Secretary Veronica Porter 07885 507899 or visit www.belcantosingers.org.uk

THE GEMINI Choir is seeking new singers. Info from Philip Morris on 07969 741137.

BLACKWELL Concert Band and Training Band is open to all brass and woodwind players of all abilities. To learn more about the band, book them, or find details of upcoming events, email-blackwellconcertband98@gmail.com or visit www.blackwellconcertband.co.uk

SINGING For Health is a group aimed specifically at people with health problems, mental or physical. They meet on Thursdays 2-3pm at St Chad's Church, Rubery (£3 per session). Everyone is welcome!

BROMSGROVE Music Centre runs FREE weekly string orchestra, concert band and beginner group Lift Off! sessions for young musicians. Run by Severn Arts at The Orchards School, Bromsgrove, on Mondays 5.45–6.45pm Individual instrumental lessons are also provided. See www.severnarts.org.uk/music-centre-groups

BROMSGROVE Folk Club meets on the second and last Thurs every month at Catshill Club 8pm. For a full list of events call Bob Bignell on 0121 476 5938 or see www.bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk

BROMSGROVE Rock Choir offers everyone the chance to sing pop, rock and chart songs – no audition needed. Free taster sessions available. More info at www.rockchoir.com or on 01252 714276.

BROMSGROVE Community Choir meets on Thurs evenings, 6–7pm at Bromsgrove Methodist Church (main church hall). They sing for fun and enjoyment; everyone welcome, singers or not. Contact Ruth Henley for details on 01527 527022 or 07812 145267, or r.g.henley@btinternet.com

BARNT GREEN CHORAL SOCIETY meets in the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, on Mondays from 7.45 - 9.45pm. The choir sings a range of music throughout the year, performing at least three concerts. New singers are always welcome and there is no need to audition. For information, see barntgreenchoralsociety.org or facebook.com/barntgreenchoralsociety.

DANCING

JAZZ HEELS CLASS FOR ADULTS. A new class held on Tuesdays 5:45-6:30pm at Hopwood Village Hall. For more info contact Amy on 07979408997.

TANGO ARGENTINO at Barnt Green Quakers/ Friends Meeting House on Saturday mornings and Thursday evenings. For further information: www.facebook.com/groups/tango42/announcements.

AELFGYTHE Border Morris is seeking new dancers (female) and musicians (male or female) to join them for fun, exercise and dancing. They meet at 7.45pm every Weds in Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall. Everyone welcome. Come and play traditional folk music, or try Morris dancing. For more details call Pam on 07961 830 831.

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WHAT'S ON GUIDE

SINBAD THE SAILOR AND THE CURSE OF ZARD

Review By Jenni Ameghino

A SPARKLING saga of swashbuckling heroes, nefarious villains and hidden treasures, Alvechurch Dramatic Society's festive romp delighted panto-goers during its run from November 28-30.

Writers Chris Davies and Paul Chamberlain drew on the sumptuous ancient tales of the Arabian Nights to fuel the tantalising plot of Sinbad the Sailor and the Curse of Zard, a follow-up to Sherry Zard and the Sultan's Curse 14 years ago.

This time, brave Sinbad (Jo Bestwick) embarked on a series of perilous quests to save the kingdom from the evil Jaffa (Alan Clark), aided by Queenie the genie (Sue Resuggan). So began an energetic adventure over high seas to sultry desert lands; the stunning sets, glittering costumes and ingenious props complementing imaginatively drawn and acted characters, including a delightful trio of bickering sirens and slapstick comedy duo Dilhi and Dalhi.

Mischievously bawdy, and at times hilariously ad-libbed, the show embodied the writers' trademark political satire and included numerous cultural references, re-imagined musical hits and gags old and new.

Some of the biggest laughs were won by Chris Davies as the outrageous Dame Delilah, and Keith Johnston as the Sultan; while Leah Yendell entertained as a plucky Princess Raisin.

FRENCH & Breton folk dancing meets at Alvechurch Village Hall on the first Sat each month from 2.30–5pm (Please check first by emailing alvechurchfrenchdance@gmail.com). Informal tuition and live music provided. New dancers (and musicians) welcome. £2 per session.

SEQUENCE Ballroom and Latin dancing every Mon evening at 8pm at the Longbridge Social Club, 1012 Bristol Road South, Northfield. Occasional free tuition. All welcome to a friendly fun-filled dance. Details from Kalvin on 07725 265024.

ALVECHURCH Morris Men are on the lookout for new dancers and musicians. They practise on Mondays at Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall, 8.30–10pm, followed by a "debrief" at a local hostelry. They dance in local towns and at various local and national events, and perform a world-famous (sort of) mummers play in the village every New Year's Day. No ability, fitness or co-ordination required – if you are male, 18+ and prepared to spend more time than is probably good for you in public houses, pop along to meet the group!
Drop in to any practice, contact Steve on 07375 592928 or email: alvechurchbagman@gmail.com

NANCY Butterfly Morris Dancers dance in the North-West Morris style (clogs!) and practise at Catshill Methodist Church Hall on Monday evenings ready to meet up with other Morris sides for social events and festivals. They are very happy to welcome new adult dancers and musicians. See: www.nancybutterfly.co.uk or Facebook for what they get up to. You can contact them via the website or Jane on 07726 915289.

AVONCROFT Folk Dance Group enjoys anything from barn dances to ones seen in *Pride & Prejudice* or *Poldark*. All welcome. The group meets every Thurs from 8–10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre, B60 4JR. £2.50 incl refreshments. Info from Liz Stanton on 01905 353995 or liz@the-stantons.uk or visit www.avoncroftfdg.weebly.com

BJ's BUSY Boots Line Dancing Classes: Tues 2–3pm Bromsgrove Leisure Centre; 7–10pm Stoke Prior Sports/Country Club. Thurs 1.15–3.30pm Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre. Social Dance usually 1st Sat in month at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane. It's a fun way to exercise. For more details phone Brenda on 01527 870151.

AMY GREAVES SCHOOL OF DANCE & Fitness offers a variety of classes for toddler up to adults. Based in Hopwood, Bournville and Longbridge. Contact 07979408997
amygreaves1@hotmail.co.uk
www.amygreavesschoolofdance.com

SEQUENCE dancing every Tuesday evening at 8pm at Fairfield Village Hall. Welcoming and friendly atmosphere, all levels welcome. For details please contact Joyce & Len on 0121 682 3266.

DANCE AND FITNESS at Bournheath Village Hall including Adult Zumba, Pilates and Stretch classes as well as KS1 and Baby Ballet. For more information message 'Dance With Nikki' on social media or n.foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

LINEDANCE CLASS, Thursdays 6pm - 7pm at Extracare Longbridge Village. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

BEGINNERS LINEDANCE class, Tuesdays 6pm - 7pm at West Heath Community Centre, Hamstead House, B31 3QY. Contact Bryan 07975569065.

NEW SALSA dance classes, every Thursday at the Alvechurch Inn, B48 7LD. Doors open at 6pm. Beginners classes at 7pm, with the main class at 8pm. All classes are £9 each or both classes for £15. Come on your own or with friends. Contact 07779686679.

DANCING POINTE offering RAD ballet classes age 3-18. Based at St Andrews first school, Barnt Green. Contact daningpointe@outlook.com.

CLUBS, GROUPS & SOCIETIES

ST GODWALD'S Community Cafe meets every other Fri from 10am–noon at St Godwald's Room adjacent to the Church Hall, Finstall Road, Bromsgrove. Friendship, cake, tea/coffee. Donations welcome— monies to St Basil's charity for homeless youngsters. More info: david-rowe876@btinternet.com

BROMSGROVE Men In Sheds is a group for anyone (male or female) who has retired or been made redundant and wants to spend time with like-minded people. The group meets Mon–Thurs, 10am–2pm at Unit 1, Metals & Ores Industrial Estate, Stoke Prior B60 4JZ. You can find more information by calling 01527 570490 or email enquiries@ageukbrwf.org.uk

BARNT GREEN QUAKERS invite you to their film screenings. Admission is free however donations are welcome. Full details can be found at The Meeting House, 6 Sandhills Rd, Barnt Green.

PLACES OF WELCOME is a growing network of local community groups who provide their neighbourhoods with places where all people can feel safe and where they can connect, belong and contribute. The network is open in St Laurence Church and The Ark on Wednesdays 10.30am-12pm, all are open to everyone and offer friendship and hospitality, free refreshments and local knowledge about the neighbourhood. Visit www.placesofwelcome.org.uk or email info@placesofwelcome.org.uk

REDDITCH Military History Society usually meets monthly in St Luke's Church Hall (Evesham Road, Redditch, B97 4JX), 7 for 7.30pm. Info from Ron on 01527 545450 or ronnieg33b@hotmail.co.uk

FRIENDS Of Bittell Reservoirs is a group of local people interested in preserving the natural environment of the Site of Special Scientific Interest at Upper Bittell, Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub reservoirs, which are important staging posts for migrant birds and wildlife. If you have an interest in preserving this unique environment and would like to help in its preservation and maintenance, contact paul_and_carrol@live.co.uk

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY runs a regular programme of social events and guided walks, as well as maintaining local footpaths. Talks and social events are held in the Village Hall, unless otherwise noted. Entry at talks and AGM is free for members and £1 for guests, including a drink and biscuits. Litter picks start at 10am. Other social events are by ticket and details of venue, start time and price will be published by the organisers nearer the time. The AVS Christmas Party: A Caribbean Christmas with Cocktails and Mocktails will be held on Saturday 14 December at 7pm. Tickets £10 each. Cash bar. BYO food. Contact Gerard Nash on gerardnash1@outlook.com. On Sat Jan 18 7:30pm will be the AVS Quiz night. Come and enjoy an evening of fun and prizes (Tickets only; details to follow).

REDDITCH Community Shed is a project that encourages skills, combats loneliness, and provides a sense of worth in people who are retired or otherwise wondering what to do with themselves. They have a woodworking work shop in the Kingfisher Centre outside Primark and they are open Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Call in for tea and biscuits and a look round. More details at www.RedditchCommunityShed.co.uk or on FaceBook.

THE MONDAY Fellowship group meets at the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church in Barnt Green at 2.30pm on the second Monday every month; £3 to include tea and biscuits and an interesting talk. Info: Amanda Dauncey on 0121 445 5966.

INNER WHEEL Club of Redditch meet on 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Southcrest Hotel Redditch. An international Women's Organisation, they enjoy a bit of everything; walks, talks, days & evenings out, and everything in between whilst at the same time helping the community. Contact Anne Robertson for information 07580351361. Or email redditch.innerwheel@gmail.com or visit www.innerwheel.co.uk

BROMSGROVE U3A for people no longer in full time work. Many activities and events - learning for fun and meeting new friends. There's a speaker meeting each month too. Full details are on the website: bromsgrove.u3asite.uk. Learn, laugh, live.

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Welcomes Refugees is a group of volunteers providing a range of support - from friendship and practical help - for all refugees and asylum seekers moving into the district. BRWR is open to all, irrespective of political or religious beliefs, and new volunteers are always needed. More info at brwr.uk

CATSHILL Carers and Bereavement Back Up Group specifically offers respite, socialising and occasional speakers to carers and bereaved in the area. It meets on the last Tues each month in the coffee bar area of Catshill Methodist Church Centre in Golden Cross Lane from 2.30pm for about 1.5hrs. All carers and bereaved welcome, as well as those who used to care for someone who has passed away or is now in a care facility. Tea and biscuits/cake provided – no charge. Contact Di (0121 445 3595) for details and encouragement.

BROMSGROVE Speakers Club meets at The Bell at Belbroughton every other Tues, 7.45–10pm. Everyone who wants to gain confidence in public speaking is welcome, book in advance www.bromsgrovespeakers.org.uk.

RE-ENGAGE aims to help isolated elderly people by offering monthly tea parties where they can reconnect or make new friends in their own community. If you know of an elderly person who could benefit, please get in touch on 07539 276054. Guests need to be aged over 75 and living alone, and must be mobile enough to walk to a driver's car with assistance. Find info at www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk or on Facebook @ ContacttheElderlyRedditch

AGE UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a free Dementia Café at Finstall Village hall. It is a free social hub aimed at people with dementia, their families, and carers in Bromsgrove and the surrounding areas. It takes place every 2nd Wednesday of the month from 10.30am-12.30pm.

BROMSGROVE Photographic Society is a friendly, active and mutually supportive club for those keen to learn about, or improve, their photographic and digital imaging skills. The growing membership has skills ranging from novice to highly skilled, within wide-ranging subjects. The club meets on Tues nights, 8-10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. For more info, visit www.bromsgroveps.com or see Facebook.

ROTARY Club of Bromsgrove meets every 2nd Tues of the month at Maekong Thai Restaurant, and every 4th Tues at Bromsgrove School, both 7pm for 7.30pm. For more info www.bromsgroverotary.org.uk or contact Ron Pearce on 07703 567982.

HEART Of England Speakers is a friendly public speaking club, based in Solihull. It is affiliated to Toastmasters International, and meets on the 1st and 3rd Tues of each month, 7.30—9.30pm, at the Silhillians Sports Club and Events Centre. If you would like to boost your confidence get in touch via www.heartspeakers.org.uk, Instagram @toastmastersheartofengland, or via LinkedIn.

REDDITCH Rotary Club meets Monday lunchtimes at the Abbey Hotel, Redditch, B98 9BE. You would be very welcome to join in. Want to be involved, hear interesting speakers, and serve your community? Contact Peter Williams on 01527 60277.

LICKEY PHAB Club is a social club where people aged 14 and over, with and without disabilities, can come together each week to have fun! It is affiliated to national charity Phab. The club meets every Mon from 7.30–9.30pm at The Trinity Centre, Lickey Parish Hall to have fun, play games, do crafts or just chat – there's also a tuck shop! More info from Louise Boother on 07814 122990 or lickeyphabclub@hotmail.com

BEACON Ladies Club meets at 8pm on alternate Weds evenings at The Hawthorns Social Club, Rednal Hill Lane, Rednal. A varied programme of speakers and outings, including occasional visits to the theatre. New members of all ages welcome. £12 annual membership, plus £2 fortnightly. Call Barbara on 0121 445 3456 or Anita on 445 3770.

BARNT GREEN FRIENDSHIP CLUB meets every 2nd Tues of the month at 2.15pm at Burcot Grange. Visitors £4 to include tea and biscuits. Members 50p. Ladies and gents both welcome. For more details call Rosalind on 0121 445 0598.

THE WORCESTER-BIRMINGHAM & DROITWICH CANALS SOCIETY holds regular monthly meetings in the meeting room behind The Weighbridge Pub, Scarfield Hill, Alvechurch on the first Tuesday of the month at 7.45pm. There is usually a guest speaker. They promote the upkeep of the canals to ensure that the heritage is looked after for all to enjoy and are a registered charity. Find out more: www.wbdcs.org.uk or Facebook @wbdcs.org.uk. or email contact@wbdcs.org.uk. Non-members are welcome. Free entry.

ALVECHURCH WEDNESDAY CLUB's don't meet in January, so their next meeting will be on the 12 February 2025. To all members and prospective members we wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy 2025 ! Anyone wanting more details of our club, please phone Janet on 0121 447 7870 or Lis on 0121 445 3895.

COFFEE, Cake and Chat is a place to meet new friends or catch up with old ones (with a dedicated baby area) on the 4th Friday of each month 10:30am-12pm at The Wheel, Blackwell. No charge, donations welcome. More info 0121 445 1425.

LICKEY Hills Local History Society meets monthly at 7.30pm in the Trinity Centre, Old Birmingham Road, Lickey B45 8ES. Annual subscription £20. Non-members £4 per meeting. Please email: info@lhlhs.org.uk or visit: www.lhlhs.org.uk. Their next meeting will be "In Search of the Bromsgrove Guild in the West Midlands" by Quintin Watt on November 19th.

BROMSGROVE (1982) PROBUS Club provides opportunities for retired and semi retired men to meet socially. A members meeting is held at Avoncroft Arts Centre on the 3rd Wednesday monthly 10am until 12pm, including refreshments and a talk by a guest speaker. Other regular activities include monthly walks, lunches including partners, snooker--, social outings and IT. For more info visit www.bromsgrove1982probus.weebly.com or contact Martin on 07717 150136.

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Soroptimists meets every 2nd Thurs of the month at Burcot Village Hall. New members welcome – pop to a meeting, email sibrsoroptimist@gmail.com or ring 07812 985927.

ALVECHURCH Historical Society has a planned programme of talks on the first Monday of the month at 7.45pm at The Ark, St Laurence Church, Alvechurch. More details from Anne Humphries on 0121 445 5955.

KINGFISHER PROBUS Club of Redditch is recruiting retired and semi-retired men to join them in a friendly environment. They meet every 2nd Thurs of the month at 11.30am at the Court Leet,174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove B61 7AY, with a short meeting at noon then lunch followed by an interesting talk given by a visiting speaker. Partners/friends welcome to join for walks, trips, golf, skittles and special lunches. Contact Chris Bailey on 01527 835802 for confirmation of date and venue. More info at www.kingfisherprobusredditch.co.uk

BROMSGROVE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at Bromsgrove Rugby Club. Doors open 7.30pm, speakers begin 7.45pm. Admission free on your first visit; refreshments available. Observing meetings are also held on the first Monday each month – bring your telescopes. More info via www.broms-astro.org.uk, www.facebook.com/bromsastro or emailing info@broms-astro.org.uk

ROTARY CLUB of Lickey Hills meets on Monday evenings, 7.15 for 7.30pm, at Hillscourt Conference Centre (NASUWT headquarters) on Rose Hill (B45 8RS). For details contact Graham Wiseman on 0121 460 1402.

SILVER THREADS, the Alvechurch club, meets on the first Weds each month at 2pm in Alvechurch Village Hall. You'll be sure of a welcome in this friendly atmosphere, where members can chat over a cup of tea. There are regular bingo sessions, and occasional days out. New members welcome. More info from Pat on 0121 447 8630.

WOODRUSH RUGBY Club "Old Dogs" meet at 8pm on the 2nd Thurs in the month at the Clubhouse, Icknield Street, 01564 822878. Open to all former players, social members and old friends for a social chat and reminisce over a glass of beer. Join us: call Mike Betts on 07960 303254 or visit www.woodrushrfc.co.uk or info@woodrushrfc.co.uk

The North Worcestershire Association of the NATIONAL TRUST hold monthly meetings with interesting speakers on 3rd Thursday 7.30pm at Tardebigge Community Hall, also walks, outings and an annual holiday. For further info email Ros257@yahoo.co.uk

Bromsgrove & District AMATEUR RADIO CLUB meets every Friday evening from 7.30pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. The club is open to anyone with an interest in Amateur Radio. More details from the secretary Alan on 07886 000052 or secretary@bromsgroveradioclub.co.uk

COMMUNITY COFFEE morning - open to all. Free refreshments and chat. Wednesdays 10-12 at Barnt Green Baptist Church. Enquiries can be made to: events@bgb.org.uk

THE MACULAR Society Barnt Green Support Group meets on the last Fri of the month (with some exceptions) at The Parish Centre, behind St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green, B45 8NR, 2–4pm. Friendly, self-help group, proving there is more to life than this devastating eye condition. New members always welcome. For more info, ring Wendy on 0121 445 1585 or Alan on 01527 877864.

REDDITCH CHESS CLUB meets at Alvechurch & Hopwood Cricket Club, Birmingham Road, Alvechurch B48 7TA, every Wednesday at 7.15pm September - May. The club has teams playing in both Birmingham and Worcester leagues. New players are welcome - just turn up or contact Giles Stanton on 07932 053621 or David Smith on 07540 304620.

SPORT, FITNESS & HEALTH

UPTON WARREN SAILING CLUB sails throughout the year at Aztec (Upton Warren) opposite Webb's Garden Centre, Wychbold. A small, friendly club with both mixed fleet racing and cruising sessions. Most members sail their own boats but there are also club boats available for members to use. See www.uwsc.co.uk to find out more or contact membership@uwsc.co.uk

JOOLISM HIIT CLASSES. Semi-PT resistance training for ladies only in a well-equipped gym in Bromsgrove. For ladies who want toned and strong bodies. Attendance must be pre-booked via julie@joolismfitness.co.uk

WOODRUSH RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB, Icknield Street, Alvechurch, B38 0EL is recruiting: Senior (Men & Ladies) U17 Colts Mini/Junior & Micros. Call 07341 256821 for recruitment or 01564 822878 (Clubhouse) email info@woodushrfc.co.uk or see: www.drushrfc.co.uk Facebook @WoodrushRFC

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY'S WALKS are held at 2pm of the first Sunday of the month unless noted otherwise. For walks starting outside the village, please contact the walk leader if you need a lift. Occasionally, weather conditions mean that a walk must be cancelled at late notice: check with the leaders or the AVS website if unsure. Always wear appropriate footwear. Contact walks organiser Tony Brannon for more information about the walks: avswalks@gmail.com. The next walk will be on Thursday 26 December at 10am, for A Boxing Day Walk to Blow Away the Cobwebs, led by Martin & Mariea Clarke 07742 100 007. Meet at Lickey Hills Visitor Centre B45 8ER. The following walk will be on Sunday Feb 2nd 2pm for A Winter Walk, led by Hilary Taylor 0121 445 0107. Meet at The Crown, Withybed B48 7PN

BARNT GREEN FISHING CLUB controls the fishing (both game and coarse) on the Bittell Reservoirs. Contact: barntgreenfishingclub@gmail.com or Facebook @Barnt Green Fishing Club.

REDDITCH & Bromsgrove Company of Archers meet April–Sept, Mon 6.30pm and Fri 6.30pm at Meadow Park Football Ground (by Harris Brush Works – outdoors) and Oct–March on Fri 6.30pm at Studley Leisure Centre (indoors). New members welcome (juniors from 8 years old, seniors from 18 to 80+, seasoned archers or absolute beginners). Beginners' courses run throughout the year or taster sessions by appointment. Further info from rbcoaCoach@gmail.com, rbcoasecretary@gmail.com, or www.redditcharchers.org

REDDITCH Ramblers is a growing and sociable group offering a full walks programme including walks every Sat and Sun and a midweek walk most weeks. Sun walk is usually 6–9 miles; the Sat walk is more challenging, usually 10–12 miles. Midweek walks vary, sometimes morning walks followed by option of lunch or full day walking. The Saturday Strollers walk fortnightly (4–5 miles). Newcomers are welcome and can walk three times with the group before deciding if they want to join. Holidays, coach trips and social events arranged throughout the year. Info at redditch.ramblers@gmail.com or www.redditchramblers.org.uk

PHYSIOTHERAPY-LED Pilates Classes in Cofton Hackett, Barnt Green and Lickey Hills. Mixed ability Daytime and Evening classes available. Mother & Baby classes also run by Women's Health Physiotherapists. Small and welcoming classes aimed to improve balance, muscle tone and posture as well as overall body strength. Contact Elizabeth on 07850 604425 or elizabethalexanderltd@gmail.com or see www.elizabethalexanderphysiotherapy.com

CLUBBERCISE@ Alvechurch: Get sweat and glow! Get ready for exercise in disguise. You'll be dancing yourself happy and sweating until you sparkle, without even realising it. Mondays 7.30–8.30pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

POUND FITNESS@ Alvechurch: Channel your inner rockstar with this full body cardio-jam session. Using Ripstix®, lightly-weighted drumsticks engineered specifically for exercising, POUND transforms drumming into an incredibly effective way of working out. Weds 7.30–8.15pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

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BARNT GREEN Sailing Club offers regular sailing, either racing or casual sailing, in beautiful surroundings at Upper Bittell reservoir. For info contact secretary@bgsc.uk or see www.sailing-barntgreen.com

BRIAR Rose Field Archers is a field archery club based near Bromsgrove. There are two qualified coaches for those interested in taking up the sport. Contact briarrosefieldarchers@gmail.com

YOGA Really Works: classes on Thurs evenings (term-time only), 7–8pm at Cotteridge Quaker Meeting House, Watford Road. Six-week blocks £45. Slow and mindful rhythmic movement in time with the breath. Accessible venue—classes open to wheelchair uses and less abled persons. Contact George on 07490 781637 or yogareallyworks@outlook.com, see www.yogareallyworks.co.uk or on Facebook @Yogareallyworks

THE RAMBLERS Bromsgrove Group: Guided walking with our group for pleasure, fitness and fun. Full programme of walks / events throughout the year. More info at www.bromsgroveramblers.webs.com or call Martin on 01527 857117 or Peter on 01527 558203.

ALVECHURCH WALKING Buddies: join a regular local walk with like-minded people who simply want to go on a local, sedate and friendly walk with no pressure. Well-behaved owners and their dogs are very welcome. The group meets at 10.30am every Thurs. For more info, search for 'alvwb' on Facebook or contact Tony on 07763 468893.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL run a series of weekly health walks around Bromsgrove and its districts. The walks are usually steady in pace and led by qualified walk leaders, and free to attend. Walks are often followed by guided sessions on the park gym equipment. Blackwell Gentle Walk, Wednesdays, 10.30am, start opposite the entrance to St. Catherine's Church. Lickey End Walking for Health, Tuesdays, 10am, meet at Lickey End Recreation Ground car park. Oakalls and Harwood Park Health Walk, Wednesdays, 2pm outside Banners in Aston Fields. Sanders Park Walk, Mondays, 9.50am for 10am start, meet at the café kiosk near the car park. There are three options: Short (30mins), Medium (2-3miles in 60-75mins), and Fast (3+ miles in 60mins). Bromsgrove Rural Walk, Fridays, 9.45am for 10am departure, meet in the Sanders Park car park extension. These rural walks vary between 4 and 7 miles and can involve driving, a system of car sharing has been established. Stoke Heath Health Walks, Thursdays, 10.30am, meet at Stoke Heath Recreation Ground.

YOGA CLASSES with a Fresh Approach, which works with your body rather than against it. Classes are for EveryBody and take place at Blackwell First School (Tues 6.30pm), at The Ark in Alvechurch (Wed 1pm & 7pm) and online. Sally has over 20 years of teaching experience, helping you to MOVE BETTER, AT YOUR PACE, & FEEL GREAT! To trial a class contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085, F: Sally My Yoga Mind.

SOCIAL TENNIS takes place at Rubery Community & Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, Rubery B45 9AD on Mondays from 11.30–2.30pm. The group would welcome a few more players – just turn up or ring Keith on 0121 445 5094.

SARACEN Cycling Club is seeking new members. Men, ladies, beginners, and regular riders are all welcome. The long-established club meets regularly by the Tardebigge Pub on Thurs at 10am and Sun at 9.45am. See www.saracenroadclub.com or call Ivor on 0121 453 2287.

LONGBRIDGE Cycling Club meets weekly on Tues and either Sat or Sun. Ride pace generally at 9-11mph overall average, varied distances. Hotel and hostel weekends away, cycle camping adventures, social outings and much more. All ages, beginners, and seasoned cyclists all welcome. Call or text Deb on 07738 982161, email debweston@aol.com or see www.longbridgecyclingclub.com or Facebook @longbridgecyclingclub

MERCIAN NORDIC WALKING: come and try a taster session for fun, fitness and friendship. More info at www.merciannordicwalking.co.uk Online fitness and personal training available at www.mercianfitness.co.uk

PILATES PILATES with Steff Affleck (Rowney Green) Mat classes, apparatus (reformer/ tower / barrels etc.) 1:1 and duets. Irrespective of age, gender, health or fitness we could all benefit from understanding more about how to keep moving well. Joseph Pilates' system of exercise, using apparatus he invented, enables you to challenge what is strong, build what is weaker, exploring how you can balance the body to move away from pain and discomfort towards greater resilience and independence. Graduate of Pilates Professional Advanced Teacher Training; teaching Pilates for 17 years. Call 07759590830 or see www.steffaffleck.co.uk

BARNT Green Sports Club (Margesson Drive, Barnt Green, B45 8LR) offers racquet sports in a friendly environment, plus running and cycling groups. Clubhouse with licensed bar. More info from Nick Butcher on 0121 445 1978 or visit www.barnt-greensportsclub.co.uk

CATSHILL FC offers youth coaching sessions each Saturday morning at Catshill Middle School, Meadow Road, Catshill, B61 0JW. Boys and girls from Reception age upwards are welcome. Contact Gary on 07462 118920 or see www.catshillfc.co.uk for further info.

BROMSGROVE & REDDITCH Badminton Club welcomes players for social and league play. Playing Sunday evenings 5.40 to 7.40pm. Details from Steve Whittaker 07805 051456.

PILATES with Lottie Newberry: Physiotherapy-led Pilates classes every Monday in Alvechurch in the day and Barnt Green in the evening. Contact Lottie on lottienewberrypilates@hotmail.com. All abilities welcome.

ACTIVE SENIORS Exercise Classes at Alvechurch Village Hall, run by Bromsgrove council on Fridays starting 9.15am, £5 per class. Contact g.peart@hotmail.co.uk or call on 07828 515344 for info.

TAI CHI (Qigong) sessions in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mon 10–11am and Friday 10.30. Qigong is an integration of physical postures, breathing techniques, and focused intentions. More details Robert Hawkesford (Bob) on 07788856642 or email rhawkesford59@gmail.com

FIVE WAYS Old Edwardians' Cricket Club at Ash Lane, Hopwood: Junior, Men's and Women's teams, come and join in! Excellent facilities. Everyone welcome. Coaching for juniors on Fri evenings May to Aug. Contact Mark Tovey on 01527 835031.

MEDITATION CLASSES for a calmer stress-free life. Classes are 35 minutes long at The Ark, Alvechurch at 2.25pm and online. Sally is an experienced teacher, has an MSc in Mindfulness Studies and can help you to REDUCE STRESS, FEEL CALMER & SLEEP BETTER. For a trial, contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085, F: Sally My Yoga Mind.

NEW Ravens (North East Worcestershire Ravens Rugby League Club) based at Forshaw Heath Lane, Portway, B94 5LH. Junior training and 'little leaguers' take place on Sun mornings from 10.30am, with open-age and touch on Weds evenings from 7pm. All welcome at this family-orientated club. Contact Gail on 07515 020844 or Jason on 07957 248464 visit www.newravens.net

KINGS Norton Rhinos offers contact and non-contact rugby for children from Reception to Year 12. A safe and friendly introduction to rugby – and plenty of outdoor fun and exercise! Training takes place at KNRFC Ash Lane, Hopwood, on Sundays from 9.30–11.30am. Contact Simon Thompson on 07968 424585 or visit www.knrfc.co.uk

HOPWOOD Ladies Cycling Club meets at Hopwood Playing Field on Tuesdays at 11.30am and Wednesdays at 9.30am. For information visit Cycling UK or email Sheila Evans on fairf8@yahoo.co.uk

MARTIAL ARTS Kickboxing/Karate at The Ark Tuesdays 6.30-7.30. For more information please visit www.forcecombatmartialarts.co.uk

SLIMMING WORLD at Cofton Village Hall, on Wednesdays 9:30am, 5:30pm and 7:30pm.

ASSERTIVENESS AND HELPING SKILLS DONINGTON TRAINING at Alvechurch Village Hall. Easy, enjoyable and effective learning. Wednesdays, pay what you think and can afford, any profits go to The Village Hall. http://tinyurl.com/DTcdates or John Talbut (0121) 445 4607.

6 WEEK MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS COURSES to help you relax, find inner peace, and elevate your life. Join them on Wednesday evenings at The Friends Meeting House in Barnt Green or online whenever it suits you. Suitable for everyone! Enrol in the upcoming courses and discover how they've been changing lives at www.MeditationWithCoz.com or contact Coz at 07770067349. Follow on Facebook/Instagram: @MeditationWithCoz.

BARNT GREEN CHUGGERS & CHAINGANG provide run & cycling sessions for mixed abilities, those wanting to stay in shape plus those wishing to improve their running, cycling & fitness all in a social & recreational environment. Club Sessions - Chuggers (run) Monday & Wednesday 7pm and Chaingang (cycling) Wednesday 7pm & Saturday 9am all from Barnt Green Sports Club. For more info or to arrange a trial session please contact kategallimore@googlemail.com

GENTLE EXERCISE CLASSES working on mobility, strength, flexibility and balance. Classes are very welcoming and inclusive and are held on: Wednesday's 1.30-2.30 at St Stephens Church Hall, Rednal and Thursdays 10am-11am Blackwell Community Hall, Blackwell. The cost is £5 per class. For information call Lorraine 07866877881

LEGS, BUMS AND TUMS every Thursday morning at The Parish Centre at 9.15am at £6 per class. All abilities welcome. Contact Natasha on 07828890774 or natasha.atkinson5@sky.com for more information.

KEEP FIT by Exercising to Music! Every Monday morning at 10am and Thursday morning at 10.15am at The Friends Meeting House. £6 per class pay as you go. All abilities welcome. Contact Natasha on 07828890774 or natasha.atkinson5@sky.com for more information.

Since the loss of many pay-and-play badminton opportunities in the Bromsgrove area after Covid, MANOR BADMINTON CLUB have re-introduced the facility! Come on down for £5 sessions with coaching included!

GARDENS & FLOWERS

BLACKWELL COMMUNITY GARDEN in the grounds of St Catherine, Blackwell. Pop along to help water, plant and harvest. Info on 0121 445 1425.

ROWNEY GREEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY meets at The Village Hall on the second Thursday each month at 7.15pm. There will be no meeting in December. The Committee would like to wish all its members and readers of *The Village* a very Merry Christmas and a very Healthy New Year. Look forward to announcing the programme for 2025 very shortly. On Thursday 9 January 2025 they welcome speaker Phil Smith and his topic is "There must be room for a Mercedes, pool and a pony (A day in the Life of a Landscape Gardener). Pip is a Landscape Designer with over 16 years experience working with the horticultural industry. Pip has been Head Gardener at several private and public gardens, most recently at the highly acclaimed Wollerton Old Hall in Shropshire. Guests are welcome £3.50 including coffee and biscuits. For more information contact Lindsay Smith on 01527 592874

DODFORD GARDENING CLUB meets on the 2nd Monday each month (except August) usually in Dodford Village Hall at 7.45pm. New members and visitors welcome. More info at www.dodfordgardeningclub.co.uk or call Penny on 07706 153618.

BROMSGROVE FLOWER CLUB holds regular monthly meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Meets at 2pm, at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove B601AF. A yearly membership is available or come as a visitor. Refreshments & then a demonstration of flower arrangements and a raffle. Further information on 07843758489 .

ART, CRAFT & LITERATURE

THE WITHYBED POETS are local people who write poetry and share and discuss it with each other. You don't have to live in Withybed Green, though most of their meetings are there. They meet regularly every six weeks or so. They like to read to local audiences and some of them write "poetry on request." For details of next meeting and more information contact marygreen5005@gmail.com.

PAINTING & DRAWING If you enjoy painting and drawing, try this friendly community group meeting in the Rubery Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, on Monday mornings, 9am-1pm, for all ages and abilities. The facilities are excellent for both indoor and outdoor working depending on personal preference and weather conditions. Tea and coffee is provided. For information: 0121 453 7716 (Fridays).

THE "CRAFTY LADIES" craft group meets every Monday morning in Alvechurch Library from 10am–1pm, with knitting, crocheting, sewing, quilting etc. More info on 01905 822722.

BURCOT WOODTURNING CLUB offers a friendly meeting place for woodturners of all abilities and experience. A varied programme includes demos, talks, hands-on practical evenings and visits to exhibitions. The group meets on the first Thurs each month, 7.15–9.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Visit www.burcotwoodturners.org.uk

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY is available to host day and short courses such as card-making or scrapbooking. If you have a skill to teach or share and would like to rent a space, call the Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

AVONCROFT ARTS SOCIETY at Avoncroft Arts Centre (Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR), runs tutored/ non-tutored classes in Art, Textiles, Ceramics, Embroidery and Dance. Contact AAS on 01527 833829 or avoncroftarts@btconnect.com

ALVECHURCH ART GROUP meets at the Baptist Hall (rear of church) every Tues from 1–3.30pm, using all mediums except oil. All welcome, especially beginners. Friendly tuition. Call Paul on 0121 445 5437 or drop in.

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY Readers Group meets in the library on the first Thursday of the month from 2pm–3pm. New members welcome. Don't forget that you can access online audio and e-books 24/7, free of charge, by downloading the Borrowbox app. Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/libraries

LICKEY HILLS ART SOCIETY, a friendly bunch of artists and those interested in art, meet at Longbridge Methodist Church, Bristol Road, B45 9TY, on the first Sat each month at 7.30pm. Open to artists and non-artists alike. For more info email Lyn lyndasharp2010@yahoo.com or come along – the members would love to see you.

SEW TOGETHER meets on Tuesday mornings from 9.15am to 12.15pm and Tuesday afternoons from 12.30pm to 3pm during term time at the new Cofton Village Hall. They meet weekly to sew and socialise. All abilities are welcome and there are a variety of sewing machines to borrow if required. Contact Avril on sewtogether64@gmail.com or see Sew Together Cofton Hackett on Facebook.

BARNT GREEN ART CLUB meets at Barnt Green Scout and Guide Headquarters in Blackwell Road just beyond the Barnt Green Social Club. They run Tuesday morning and afternoon sessions with visiting tutors at 2 - 3 week intervals. Interested artists of all abilities are welcome. Please phone Jackie on 0121 445 4745 for details.

MARLBROOK QUILTERS meet on the 1st Wednesday of the month at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. They are a small friendly group who would like to welcome new members. For more information contact Maggie Forknell 07973 313034 or Sheila Nunnerley 0121 445 2238.

THE SEASONS ART CLASS is a course where you can discover your inner artist. Perfect for absolute beginners to improvers. Classes held at Rowney Green Village Hall, Bournheath Village Hall & Ullenhall Village Hall. Get in touch to find out more by emailing seasonsartredditch@outlook.com.

KINGS NORTON PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY meet at The Tennis Club, Grange Hill Road, Birmingham B38 8RE. For information contact Dave Wall Tel: 0121 458 2562, email: dave.walluk@virgin.net

ART & SOUL CREATIVE - Weekly Art, Craft and Design Clubs in Alvechurch - painting, drawing, textiles, pottery, sculpture, craft etc.- weekly kids Art clubs - Mon (Y10-13), Wed (Y4-6) & Thurs (Y7-9) 6.45 - 8.15pm term times. Adult Tuition, GCSE/A Level Art Tuition. For info email artandsoulcreative.org@gmail.com or call 0121 445 0655

FORGE MILL CREATIVE TEXTILE GROUP are a friendly group of local stitchers, experienced & beginners. Meet on Friday mornings at Beoley Village Hall. A leisure learning and development group exploring techniques and media to create textiles artwork. Please contact Lynda on 0121 445 3212 or Janet on 0121 445 4335 for information.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

BABY Bounce & Rhyme is at Alvechurch Library Mondays 10–10.30am. Sing-a-long to traditional nursery rhymes and action songs.

STORYTIME at Alvechurch Library is on Tuesdays 11–11.30. Silly stories and tall tales for pre-school children to enjoy with parents and carers.

CURIOUS CUBS: An outdoor playgroup promoting nature and learning through play. Sessions run on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays for walkers to five years. Based at Barnt Green Sports Club, Margesson Drive, B45 8LR. Visit www.curiouscubs.co.uk for more infomation and to book your place.

DRAMA TOTS: Award-winning imaginary play classes for children 18 months to 5 years. Classes run term-time on Monday mornings in Alvechurch/Fridays in Barnt Green (other days/venues available). Contact Jo 07738 969460 for details.

TINY CHURCH (stay and play for under-5s and carers) meets in Holy Trinity Church, Lickey, each Weds from 11.15am–12.30pm during term times. Games, toys, snacks and stories, and a time to meet together with God. Just pop along, or contact 0121 445 1425 clive.rushton@btinternet.com

THE NATIONAL CHILDBIRTH TRUST (NCT) runs popular antenatal and postnatal courses to grow your knowledge and network, feel prepared and confident moving into the next chapter of your life. Discover and learn with other local parents-to-be, make life-long friends in your community. Held at St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green. www.nct.org.uk/courses-workshops or call 0300 330 0700.

SOLIHULL BABY MASSAGE is at Rowney Green Village Hall on Tuesdays. A relaxed environment for parents and babies to bond through massage. Visit www.solihullbabymassage.co.uk

NEW ROAD PARENTS SUPPORT for parents of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans children meets monthly in Bromsgrove. A confidential, voluntary, small support group for parents by parents. Close links with FFLAG. Visit www.newroadparents.org, email newroadparents@gmail.com or Facebook @ New Road Parents Lgbtqi+ Support Group.

THEATRETRAIN Bromsgrove, performing arts for children 4-18yrs. Saturdays 10.30am-1.30pm. For a half-price trial email bromsgrove@theatretrain.co.uk or call 07766 724834.

TUTORING both online and in-person for Maths KS1 and KS2. English KS1 through to GCSE. For more information message 'Tutoring with Penny' on Facebook or email penny_foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

PRE-SCHOOL BALLET - Pre-school (2 ½ - 4 yrs) ballet held at Barnt Green Baptist Church on Monday mornings from 10am. Contact dancingpointe@outlook.com for further details.

STAY & PLAY for under 5s and their carers running each Thursday from 9:30-11:30am during term time at Barnt Green Baptist Church, Bittel Road. Just pop along for play, singing & story time. Email familypastoral@bgb.org.uk

BLACKWELL STAY & PLAY on Mondays during term time at Blackwell Community Hall. Under 5s and their carers are welcome from 9.30am – 11am

LITTLE KITCHEN CLUB a toddler and preschool age cooking and play classes running on Wednesdays and Fridays in Redditch. Visit www.littlekitchenclub.co.uk for more details.

WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

FINSTALL CROSS WI meets at Finstall Village Hall on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm. For more info see www.finstallcrosswi.org or email finstallcrosswi@gmail.com

BEOLEY WI meets on the first Tuesday of each month in Beoley Village Hall at 7pm. More info from Joan Lovett on 01527 584047 or email beoleysec@wfedwi.org.uk

BENTLEY PAUNCEFOOT WI meets at 7pm on the second Tuesday every month between April and November, and at 12pm December to March, at Bentley Village Hall (B97 5TB). More information from Helen Spence (01527 822622)or email bentleypauncefootsec@wfedwi.org.uk

BARNT GREEN WI meets at the Baptist Church at 7.30pm on the 3rd Thursday of the month. For information: Sheila Nunnerley 07465 439646.

ALVECHURCH WI meets on the second Monday each month in Alvechurch Village Hall, at 7.30pm. For more information email Lin Neal lin.neal@hotmail.com or alvechurchpres@wfedwi.org.uk

LICKEY WI usually meets on the first Tues every month at 7.30pm in the Parish Hall (Trinity Centre), Old Birmingham Road, Lickey. More info from Jenny Ryder on 0121 445 1872, Lickeywi@gmail.com or www.lickeywi.wordpress.com

HILLSIDE AT ALVECHURCH WI meets at 7.45pm on the first Weds each month at The Ark, Alvechurch. For more information contact Marian Clemons

continues overleaf

Left: Action from Alvechurch FC's two-goal victory away at Bromsgrove Sporting.

Right: New manager Tim Flowers has seen positive results.

Photos: ***Ian Macvie.***

Topsy-turvy Church

Alvechurch FC's roller-coaster season continues apace: from flying high at the top of the table early on, the side then managed just one point from a possible 21 and parted company with manager Jimmy Fry before bringing in former Premier League player Tim Flowers from Redditch United as the new boss after a spell without a manager.

Then in his first league game in charge, Flowers saw his side beat Bedford Town 1-0 at home, followed by a 0-3 away victory against Highgate United in the Birmingham Senior Cup.

Then on the last day of November, Alvechurch FC visited the Victoria Ground in Bromsgrove and came away with all three league points after a 0-2 victory.

There was no league action in December before *The Village* went to press, but already the Church had risen away from the relegation zone to mid table in the Southern League Premier Central and the side was looking forward to a home tie against Spalding United, six places lower in the table, on December 14, providing Storm Darragh had blown itself out by then.

Meanwhle, a great run in the FA Trophy saw Alvechurch drawn away to National league side Boston United in the third round after a 5-4 penalty victory against Chasetown in the previous round.

It was the first time the club had reached the third round since losing 2-3 at home to eventual winners Bishop's Stortford in the 1980/81 season, and again it proved a match too far as they were knocked out by a single goal 1-0.

But the Church stay in the Worcestershire Senior Cup after a 0-1 victory away at Evesham, whom they beat in the final to take the title last season. They meet Stourbridge in the quarter final on December 17.

AFC FIXTURES

December

Sat 14th	Spalding United (h) 3pm
Tue 17th	Stourbridge (h) 7.45pm (Worcestershire Senior cup)
Sat 21st	Harborough Town (a) 3pm
Thur 26th	Stratford Town (h) 3pm
Sat 8th	Biggleswade Town (a) 3pm

January

Wed 1st	Banbury United (a) 3pm
Sat 4th	Bishop's Stortford (h) 3pm
Sat 11th	Kettering Town (a) 3pm
Tue 14th	Lowestoft Town (a) 7.45pm
Sat 18th	Barwell (h) 3pm
Sat 25th	AFC Telford United (h) 3pm
Tue 28th	Kettering Town (h) 7.45pm

Village What's On

on 07586354826 or follow them on Facebook: Hillside WI at Alvechurch

BLACKWELL & BURCOT WI meets at Burcot Village Hall on the second Weds each month, at 2pm. For info call President Mrs Barbara Knight on 0121 445 3456.

HOPWOOD WI meets at Hopwood Village Hall on the first Thurs of the month at 7.30pm. For more information call Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668.

ST CATHERINE'S BLACKWELL WI meets on the 3rd Wednesday each month at 7.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Contact Sue Barrett for more information on 01527 596092 or susanbarratt222@gmail.com

RUBERY WI meets on the 2nd Weds of the month at 7.30pm at Beacon Church Centre, when there are speakers, activities and competitions. The 4th Weds of each month is the craft evening. Non-members are welcome. Contact Judie1055@yahoo.co.uk 07810765314.

FAIRFIELD WI meet at Fairfield village hall on the second Wednesday of the month at 7pm. For further details contact Carol Hine at fairfieldwi1932@gmail.com

You might have noticed our What's On is a little shorter than usual this month. If you can't find what you're looking for, don't worry it will be back to normal in the new year!

FEATURE IN WHAT'S ON

If you would like to feature your group or event in *The Village* What's On section, the deadline for the February issue is 10 January 2025. info@villageonline.co.uk

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